

# **DOCUMENTING THE MAKING PROCESS**

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**by**

**John Freeman**

**Department of Performing Arts, Brunel University**

**April 2001**

## ABSTRACT

This thesis documents the construction of a performance project, *At Last Sight*, which was made with a group of undergraduates at University College Chester. The leader of that project is the same person as the writer of this thesis; this locates the act of writing as something embedded within the process of performance making.

The writing forms an address to the unreliability of objective observational analysis. It does so through a resistance to those attempts at impartiality and detachment that might usually be expected in an academic investigation. In this case partiality and involvement are more than central to the investigative process, they form the very structure of enquiry.

The body of this work was written at the same time as *At Last Sight* was being constructed, and the ideas encountered herein possess many of the rhythms of performance making.

Space is both somewhere performance is made and an integral aspect of the made work. In a similar way the following chapters amount to more than the site where work has been recorded. In tracing the footprints that led to *At Last Sight* the thesis reveals itself as an element of that which is being traced. Where *At Last Sight* revealed the performers as the to-be-watched and also as the watchers, the study functions as the to-be-read and also as the reading. In this way the documentation becomes the documented.

This notion of integration between the subject and its study runs through the thesis. Approaching performance analysis as something 'other' creates a gap between it and its subject that can deny the best attempts to bring the two together. Approached in a less compartmentalised way the analysis is allowed to form an indivisible correspondence with the analysed. When the division between the act and the analysis is dissolved the documentation is able to exist as both fixed object and time-based event. Something of the fluidity of process is acknowledged and articulated in each of the sections presented.



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## Acknowledgements

Dr Susan Broadhurst was my second supervisor and she and Professor Mike Pearson examined the thesis. They each offered apposite and much appreciated advice. Thanks go to them, and also to Dr John Aplin.

Colleagues past and present have contributed much to the ideas that inform this thesis. In particular, thanks go to John Stephens, Valerie Kosh and Allan Owens.

Special mention needs to be made of the students whose full commitment to the project of *At Last Sight* turned the process of research into a pleasure:

Liz Hague  
Andrew Proudfoot  
Chris Roberts  
Glenn Robertson  
Sarah Robertson  
Laurent Ruggeri  
Anke Sauthof  
Sarah Skelton

Ultimately, this thesis could not have been written without the support, guidance, knowledge and encouragement of my supervisor Barry Edwards. His influence runs through every page of the work.

What qualities exist in the thesis stem from Barry Edwards' supervision, whilst any failings that remain are mine alone.

# PREFACE

12-10-00

This thesis began as an investigation of certain processes involved in the creation of a performance project. Notwithstanding the fact that the project in question was being 'constructed' by myself, it was my intention that the investigation be largely dispassionate ... that the making would lead to reflection, but that the activity of reflecting would not impact on the ways the work was made. This was the discipline I sought to impose. In practice, the making process proved resistant to the divisiveness of this discipline. It became impossible to achieve. Furthermore, as the project progressed, it was revealed as antithetical to the nature of making work.<sup>1</sup>

Where writing about performance is often at some remove from the performance it critiques, this investigation is engaged with its subject at an immediate level, and this has emerged as the most telling aspect of the thesis. Performance is an event as well as an object ... in order to investigate 'process' without resorting to calcification, the writing needs to foreground its own eventness. The thesis questions the extent to which the documentation of practice can be effective when the documentation and the documented are practised at one and the same time

The body of this thesis was written at the same time as the practical project it investigates, *At Last Sight*, was being made. The accompanying time-lines as sub-headings reveal the dates on which each section was written. *At Last Sight* was a



performance project which I directed with a group of final year undergraduates over the course of an academic year.

**14-10-00**

The immediacy of doing/writing brought with it a specific challenge ... the challenge was not only to question the extent to which one can read one's own work, but to investigate the possibilities of making that reading in a perpetual present. The claim to originality of the thesis rests on the rigour and detail of the painstaking documentation of a performance construction. No similar studies exist. The thesis, therefore, is an investigation of a particular type of documentation. Crucially, the thesis is not about the theory of documentation. It is about a method of documentation which is part of the practice of making performance. The thesis stands as an exploration of *this* way of investigating process. It is not writing *about* experimental practice, it is writing *as* experimental practice. In this way, what will emerge is an attempt at investigative writing as both research activity and as research. Whilst the idea of practice as research has become relatively well established, the writing up of this is not conceptually agreed at present. The example to follow makes a contribution to this field.

**18-10-00**

The present is a given of live performance. Whatever we see is happening in the here and now, regardless of any fictional 'period' within which the work may be set.<sup>2</sup> This concentration on the present can be the benchmark by which the quality of any given performer is generally determined.<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of academic enquiry, however, the present is often delayed. Academic enquiry is generally

thought of as comprising reflection, re-evaluation and consideration. In this way an idea can be tested and contextualised within a framework of ongoing research. This thesis sets out to question this implicit methodology. It asks: ‘What happens if I do not work in this way?’ ‘What happens if the investigation I make is not tempered by time?’ As such, the thesis is the exploration of a different method of selection.

This thesis repositions the temporal relationship between reflection, revision and practice. It has been the intention that the writing would investigate as concurrent a documentation of the practice as was possible. This does not mean that the thesis is being presented as the creation of a prototype for future practitioners ... as though a student of performance in the years to come would seek to recreate *At Last Sight* (or something like it) from this record. That is not the intention. The thesis is submitted as a prototype for the documentation of one’s own practice: as an example of a way of reading practice from within, rather than as an exemplar of a particular way of making work. It is not about abstracting documentation to something universal, although my own personal practice shares a number of approaches, which might be regarded, as ‘common’.

It is important that the thesis is recognised as an exploration of *a* process of making performance work, not *the* process.

**22-10-00**

The making of performance is a process plagued with doubt. The work that this thesis is concerned with was made at the end of a century and a millennium, at a



time of change, both natural and forced. The thesis is at times something of an argument against itself, inasmuch as it is seeking to articulate that which remains steadfastly inarticulate in any form other than the performative. Where the performance events that were parts of *At Last Sight* resisted closure - to the point where an absence of fixity was as integral to the performers' tasks as it was to the denial of any overt message or meaning - written words are not only suggestive of finality, they *are* final. This creates a contradiction that the thesis wrestles with throughout.

As a strategy for dealing with this, I have attempted to acknowledge the implication of my own writing in the processes that I recount,<sup>4</sup> and also to draw the attention of the reader to the overt incompatibility of the ephemeral and the fixed. That the documentation of the processes of performance making is as vexed an area as it currently is gives testament to the difficulty of recording time-based work in a space-based medium. It is for this reason that the writing was made subject to many of the durational demands and limitations as was the making. What emerges is a written work that recognises the linear limitations of writing as something at odds with the experience of performance, at the same time as it seeks to utilise this very linearity through a merging of making and writing. The thesis is concerned with a way of documenting and with that which is being documented. It is questioning the possibilities, through the chapters of the thesis, of reflecting on reflection.



23-10-00

During the period in which the thesis was written my preoccupations were with the challenges of making work, alongside an attendant and in-depth articulation.<sup>5</sup> That these preoccupations speak at once of self and of self-awareness creates an alliance with the self-reflectivity of postmodernism.<sup>6</sup> I can identify certain elements of postmodern practice that have been integral to my own making processes.<sup>7</sup> These are articulated as and when they occur within the timescale of the writing and the practice: without pre-empting the narrative of the thesis, I can describe them as

- 1: a foregrounding of intertextuality
- 2: an interest in shifting performative identities
- 3: experimentation with the narcissism of autobiography
- 4: the revelation rather than concealment of process
- 5: an absence of closure
- 6: the exposure of artifice
- 7: an investigation of spectator/performer relationships<sup>8</sup>

2-11-00

The thesis is primarily concerned with a new model for writing about performance making, rather than ways of making new performance. The inclusion here of these 'making' elements should not dissuade the reader from a concentration in the thesis on the investigation of a means of *documentation*.

At all times the research is investigating what happens when the reflective act of writing occurs at as close a time as possible to the performance making.<sup>9</sup> Where this results in sudden shifts in emphases and/or approach the reader is asked to consider these as traces of a process that was always as creative as it was

analytical. The time-line will reveal those occasions when the periods between rehearsal and written reflection are stretched, as well as those when the time between is very short. This is part of the investigative process. *At Last Sight* was not a 'full-time' project and this thesis was written in the spaces that opened up between full-time teaching posts at University College Chester and De Montfort University.

In most cases it is not practical to look at every object or question, and this case has been no different. The investigator has to work with samples and the usefulness of the findings will depend largely on the extent to which that sample is held to be representative. The process of making performance is not formulaic and events that may be of importance with the value of hindsight may not have been investigated fully at source. Where these omissions occur (and informed readers will draw their own conclusions) they stand as proof of the representative nature of the study. What was written about was regarded as significant *at the time*, and time was always the most pressing agent of determination. Fieldwork involves observing and asking questions. With this project, those questions have been asked of the self. The thesis then stands as an aspect of self-presentation. After Goffman, we can say that this consists of the self's effort to convey a particular image of itself, or information about itself, to other people.<sup>10</sup> If the self-presentation developed in this thesis seems to be based as much on the self-presenter's own standards as on those of the readers then it is in keeping with Schlenker's belief that self-presentation is the result of a trade-off between favourability and plausibility.<sup>11</sup>



5-11-00

Thinking about the self is not universally regarded as a plausible activity. A blow to self-knowledge came from Nisbett and Wilson, who contended that people are not able to know and report on much that happens inside their own minds. People, they argue, may know their attitudes and opinions, but they are incapable of knowing how they arrived at these. Furthermore, if they think about their attitudes for too long, especially in endeavouring to assess the reasons for these to have occurred, they can end up in nowhere but confusion.<sup>12</sup> This thesis seeks to challenge this idea.

A research report tells the story of how a researcher investigated a particular area. Thus, a research report has a linear, narrative structure with a beginning, middle and an end. When joined together in this way information becomes easier to comprehend and recall ... in this way a research report, a thesis, tells a story.<sup>13</sup> Describing a thesis as a story is not just a convenient metaphor. Theses are stories. Stories that consist of two components: a telling of what happened, and an explanation as to why it happened in the ways that it did. This thesis is a story. It begins with the construction of a written text for performance, and it explains the reasoning behind key decisions and the impact they had on that construction. Subsequent chapters document the process of making, leading to a 'final' performance in Chester, in May 1999. A further performance of *At Last Sight* took place at FESTUPIC, a festival of performance in Compiègne, France, but this fell beyond the intentional timescale of the thesis.<sup>14</sup> Because, for the bulk of the thesis,



the investigation is in between *post* and *pre* rehearsal the thoughts are a blend of reflection and projection. The thesis asks what happens when one tries to write about performance making in this type of 'present'. A present that makes the writing a part of the performance.

If *At Last Sight* was an act of mimesis, inasmuch as it consisted of actions seen in performance, then this thesis is an act of diegesis, telling the reader things they did not – indeed, *could not* - see for themselves. In one way *At Last Sight* was not a culturally significant production.<sup>15</sup> It was seen by perhaps 1,500 people ... large for a curriculum-driven and student-cast project, but small in comparison to touring, professional product.<sup>16</sup> The work was never reviewed. No dramatic text has been published. The thesis in this way gives permanence to an otherwise ephemeral (and almost invisible) event. This is a consequence of the thesis, not an objective.

Just as 'a successful piece of research doesn't conclusively settle an issue',<sup>17</sup> so this thesis does not attempt to provide answers for all researcher/practitioners for all time. The thesis serves an important archival function, documenting a particular type of research, it is also hopes to serve as a stimulus. It can excite other researchers to join the investigation of a particular issue, or to apply new methods to the study of performance making.

6-11-00

The reader will note that the personal pronoun 'I' is used throughout the thesis, and that, rather than emphasising the subject above the investigator, I am locating the investigator's developing understanding of the subject as a central aspect. This is not entered into through any ignorance of the (usual) fact that 'the writer's style should convey the impression of impartiality and detachment rather than personal involvement',<sup>18</sup> so much as it is through a recognition that *within this thesis* the writer's personal involvement is at the core of the study. This is a research decision. It is a means of asking whether the 'I' provides a useful perspective on the making process.

The use of 'I' carries with it a certain authority. As though the writer's own words and beliefs create a kind of truth. And the idea of 'truth', with its obverse 'lies', permeates much of the thesis. Joanna Frueh has written in *Erotic Faculties* of 'followers who have turned the fascinating and useful writings of father figures of speech into cant and canon.'<sup>19</sup> Frueh goes further to say that 'Cant demeans the reality of personal experience.'<sup>20</sup> My own approach reveals a developing drift towards a faith in this 'reality', even at those times when the vocabulary of choice seems set most firmly against it. Whilst I am aware of the dangers of being seen to disregard that which I also embrace, I am obliged to record *that which happened* ... even when its occurrence ran counter to my expectations. Truth is a contingent category, with no reliability and no absolutes, and yet the truth of my experience appears to deny relativism on my own part. This means that whilst any claim to



offer a definite interpretation of events that were *witnessed* is doomed to failure, an event that was experienced *internally* can be held to be true, if only to s/he who experiences. The thesis addresses whether it is appropriate to ask questions about 'truth' in an investigation of performance.

Where the performance of *At Last Sight* is a masquerade of sorts, the writing of this thesis is an attempt to deal with the truth *as I saw it*. Sometimes this is prosaic: I will not, for example, be saying that five people were at a rehearsal when four were present.<sup>21</sup> At other times, during the reading of events, my engagement will be more complex. For the most part, we can substitute the word 'truth' for 'significance', inasmuch as imbuing an occurrence with significance is less problematic than regarding that same occurrence as 'true' and incontestable.

Truth and reality are subject to certain plasticity, and postmodern practice strives to reveal something of this ambiguity in presentation. Truths, like theories, do not always stand the test of time. It is within this spirit of temporary reliability that the reader is asked to engage with this report.

7-11-00

In this way the thesis is a record of 'a' truth and not 'the' truth. As *At Last Sight* was open to a series of interpretations so too is this thesis. It is a characteristic of language that webs of meaning are generated and that any and all texts are necessarily self-contradictory. This thesis is no different. It is, in Wittgenstein's terms,<sup>22</sup> a language game, inasmuch as it is a work, which, in seeking to capture the



language of the performance-making process, is handicapped 'because the attempt to do so itself constitutes a (further) language game.'<sup>23</sup> The writing thus deals in the persuasive, the provisional and the contingent, and it does so as a means of stating a position. The position remains as *mine* and it is tempered throughout by its own deliberate self-referentiality.

To paraphrase Keats' distrust of literature with a palpable design on us, I can say that this thesis does not seek to convert or influence the views of the reader. It is an investigation, presented as the documentation of my experience as a maker of performance. It explores the extent to which the divide between the observer and the observed dissolves. In this, it is a troublesome work, for when an artwork is also an object of theoretical discourse the worlds of rational objectivity collapse in on those of the subjective and the intuitional.

What follows then is at once a reflection on process and process itself. It became evident during the writing that distinctions between making the work and writing about it were dissolving to the point where one bled into the other without deliberation. In this way, the thesis has emerged as being as much a part of *At Last Sight* as were any of its performances. *At Last Sight* does not exist *through* this writing so much as it exists *in* the writing. Similarly, the writing/making does not *record* an experience ... it was an experience in itself. As writer/maker I have not been involved in the thesis so much as being *inside* it ... and it is the analysis of this 'insidedness' that gives the thesis both its immediacy and its wider relevance

to performance-makers who seek to document the processes leading to the performances they make.

Giannachi and Luckhurst begin their 1999 text *On Directing* with a recognition that a reason for ‘the scarcity of material on directors and directing practices in Britain must be the absence here of both oral and written traditions in the articulation of process.’<sup>24</sup> Their introduction continues with the statement that ‘It is extremely difficult for anyone to theorize the creative processes pertaining to a particular performance.’<sup>25</sup> Despite being written before the publication of *On Directing* the chapters of this thesis can be read as a response to its authors’ opening remarks.

#### 10-11-00

What are the implications of calling a thesis a performative act: a record of process and also process *per se* ... the documentation of performance making and also performance making as documentation? Is it the case that the importance of the thesis lies not in its relationship to the referent that was ‘the process observed’ as in the duality of its existence? What happens when the thesis is not akin to Plato’s shadows on the cave wall, anymore than *At Last Sight* might be regarded as the object/event that threw them there? When thesis and performance, the investigation and the investigated, are offered as parts of the same process?

This thesis forms an address to these questions.



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<sup>1</sup> My findings here are not dissimilar to Judith Butler's experiences of research towards the publication of *Bodies that Matter* (Butler, J. Routledge, 1993). Butler attempted to 'consider the materiality of the body only to find that the thought of materiality invariably moved (her) into other domains'. p. ix

<sup>2</sup> This is also the case with cinema. However, the distinction with live performance is that the 'here and now' is shared by spectators and performers.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth LeCompte regards presence as the area of her work with the Wooster Group that is of prime importance. In an interview with Nick Kaye, she states that 'the constant battle for me as a director is find ways that an actor can be always present, always alive, always thinking this is the first and last moment that she's there'. In *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*. Huxley, M & Witts, N (eds.) Routledge, London & New York, 1996. p.232

<sup>4</sup> I borrow here from the terminology Nick Kaye uses to describe Salman Rushdie's writing in *Shame*. Kaye, N *Postmodernism and Performance*. Macmillan, London, 1994. p.10

<sup>5</sup> The thesis was 'written' over a three-year period, which breaks down into three relatively even sections. The period 1997-98 involves a study of the processes of creating a written text for performance; 1998-99 deals with how that text is worked through in rehearsal through to performance; 1999-2000 was a period of reflecting on the process.

<sup>6</sup> It is important at this point to articulate my understanding of the term 'postmodern', as it relates to *At Last Sight* and also to the practice of this thesis. In part, I am using the term postmodernism because of its very ubiquity: as there is no single 'postmodernism', so there exists no one emanating theory. What we are able to say, as a summary of Barrett and Philips (Barrett & Philips, *Destabilising Theory*, 1992) is that a feature of postmodernism is a desire to reveal the ideological bias contained in the production of knowledge, and that this act of exposure seeks to focus attention on the perspectives from which work is created. This will be a feature of both the creation of *At Last Sight* and this thesis. In this way any and all notions of neutrality will be called into question. As Michele Barrett (1992) tells us 'To address specific truths ... is to discover not the controlling modernism of a fully integrated theory of knowledge, but precisely the reverse – an incommensurability of knowledge that provokes interesting reflection.' (p.116)

In addition to provoking Barrett's interesting reflection, this thesis forms an invitation to the reader to consider those perspectives embodied in the creation of performance that would normally remain hidden, perhaps even from the creating self. In attempting this articulation of the ways in which *this* performance will be created from and through 'self', it is appropriate to acknowledge the stance which is motivating my own research ... to expose my own authorial bias. The approach which allows for such a declaration of bias owes its allegiance to no single disciplinary stance. It is, therefore, more able to accommodate the complexity of such a self-reflective concept as the performance maker reading 'his' own work.

Inasmuch as the thesis will be attempting to construct a language that enacts liberation rather than being content to describe a liberal process, the narrative of the thesis is likely, in Zygmunt Bauman's terms, to 'go around in circles, rather than developing in a straight line. Some topics (will) return later, to be looked upon once again in the light of what we have discussed in the meantime. This is how all effort of understanding works. Each step in understanding makes a return to previous stages necessary ... the process may never end; but much may be gained in its course.' (Bauman, Z. *Thinking Sociologically*. Blackwell, Oxford, 1990. P.19.) As Bauman regards this as a postmodern position, so too is this the broad area within which this thesis will function.

This is not intended to deny the influence of other theoretical perspectives: post-structuralism and phenomenology, for example. Neither is it asking to be read as an uncritical embrace of all that postmodernism might stand for. Ultimately, it is in the sense of postmodernism as a radical eclecticism, built on juxtapositions of conflicting discourses that it is being used here.

<sup>7</sup> My own 'understanding' of postmodernism, as it relates to performance, is determined by the specific set of circumstances in which the work I see, read about and discuss takes place. In this, I am writing



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from a particular late twentieth century academic perspective, which is at all times, and for better or worse, identifiably British. Furthermore, as a maker of performance, as well as a teacher and writer of it, postmodernism is something I am responding to as both artist and critic.

<sup>8</sup> These seven 'headings' cover the areas I am interested in *at the time of writing*. They are not offered here as the 'most important aspects of postmodernism', so much as indications of address.

<sup>9</sup> 'Same time' here refers to 'Same time scale', inasmuch as the writing about rehearsals occurred in the midst of that rehearsal period. As a project that took place over the course of an academic year, there were periods when the writing happened several days after the rehearsal it describes, during vacation periods, for example, when the student-group were unavailable. Clarity is provided by the dating of passages of writing.

<sup>10</sup> Goffman, E *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor Books, New York, 1959

<sup>11</sup> Schlenker, B.R. *Impression Management: The self-concept, social identity, and interpersonal relations*. Brooks/Cole, Monterey, CA, 1980. P. 41

<sup>12</sup> Nisbett, R., & Wilson, T.D. "Telling More Than We Can Know: Verbal Reports on Mental Processes" *Psychological Review*, 84, 1977. pp. 231-259

<sup>13</sup> Parsons, C. J. *Theses and Project Work*, Heinemann, London, 1978. pp.21-27

<sup>14</sup> It is also the case that *At Last Sight* is continuing. Not as a performance project of that name, but as an idea that is informing the work I am currently engaged in. This aspect of influence is something that is addressed within this thesis ... indeed, it is central to it.

<sup>15</sup> Cultural significance is difficult to determine, and I use it here in the sense of the work's low cultural visibility. *At Last Sight* was never performed at a non-university venue ... the festivals it played at were university festivals, making the spaces 'university venues' at the times they were performed in. Few people beyond Chester, Liege and Compiègne would have heard about the work. However, Chris Roberts, a performer in *At Last Sight*, is now pursuing research to PhD, and I have no doubts that his interest in resistant performance (his topic) was fuelled in part by his participation in *At Last Sight*. Liz Hague is now a full-time performer with an established company and Sarah Robertson is a professional drama animateur. The overall cultural significance of *At Last Sight* is impossible to predict with accuracy.

<sup>16</sup> This is not to suggest that *every* small-scale, touring project plays to more than 1,500 people. It was not the size of the audience(s) that is particularly relevant in the case of *At Last Sight*, so much as the status of the work as 'Student'.

<sup>17</sup> Cohen, J. "A Review of Research and Theory" *Psychological Bulletin*, 88. pp.82-108

<sup>18</sup> Parsons, C. J. 1978. p.56

<sup>19</sup> Frueh, J *Erotic Faculties*. University of California Press, Los Angeles and London, 1996. p.44

<sup>20</sup> *ibid* p.45

<sup>21</sup> I refer here to 'truth' in the terms suggested by Lee Nichol in *On Creativity* (Bohm, D. Routledge. London & New York, 1998). Nichol suggests that "A critical question arises: How can we know if our ... views are true or false? Given that it is folly to presume that the content of any worldview ... is "the truth" ... truth in content relies on observable correspondence: (such as) "It is true that the sun has arisen every day for the past week." (p. xix).

I am asserting certain truths in content, and will not be inventing data.

<sup>22</sup> Lechte, J *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers*. Routledge, 1994. p. 247

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

<sup>24</sup> Giannachi, G and Luckhurst, M *On Directing: Interviews with Directors*. Faber & Faber Ltd, London, 1999. p.xv

<sup>25</sup> *ibid* pp. xv-xvi



# Introduction

5-9-97

As an introduction to this thesis I will declare three areas of address. The first of these is a synopsis of the area to be investigated, the *what* of the thesis. The second comprises the *how*, the ways in which the subject will be treated, the methods of analysis to be undertaken. The third element is the *why*. Why *this* researcher at *this* time and in *this* way is seeking to explore *this* unknown. The ‘unknown’ in this case is the creation of a new work of performance. The introduction functions as a pre-text to this, and also as a ‘text’ in itself, as an integral element of the thesis it seeks to set up. As such, the space given over to these opening remarks may well be as great as that which is afforded to later chapters. It is hoped that this is read, as it is intended, as a positive and necessary means of preparation for the argument(s) which will develop over subsequent pages.

The introduction is not designed to create an inflexible pattern for either the writing or the reading of the work, so much as to alert the reader to the complexities of the problem to be addressed, as well as to those of the writer in tackling the task. To provoke an opening up of possibilities rather than to prescribe the course the thesis will follow. Accordingly, the thesis is not intended as the articulation of categorisation, of the labelling of work as either ‘realist’ or ‘real’, ‘modern’ or ‘postmodern’ ... although these terms, the stuff of seemingly endless critical debate, will feature large and often as the paper unfolds. The thesis will not demonstrate a concern, in the final analysis, with arriving at any resolution as to what performance work *is*, so much as *how* work (a specific performance-project



made alongside and as part of this thesis) is constructed. The area of investigation is thus broadly defined as the making process: 'The Making Process'.

16-9-97

Contemporary thought, both philosophical and scientific, has come to regard human behaviour as being implicitly subject to the impact of a number of factors: behaviour is determined and, theoretically, a causal rationale, an explanation, can be posited for any and all activity entered into by human beings.<sup>1</sup> It follows then that artistic creation can be subject to a similar process of thorough investigation, locating the 'creator' within an appropriate structure defined by an alliance (always present) of the personal, the public and the private. This is not to deny entirely the romantic-sounding notion of intuition so much as to recognise that creative activity is no less a product of a series of determinants than of that which one might describe as 'everyday behaviour'.<sup>2</sup>

An argument could be made that certain actions, such as reflexes, are not the result of choice and, thus, are not subject to the same level of determination. However, even in those instances where artists deliberately locate themselves in positions of indeterminacy their own reliance on chance is indicative of choice. John Cage's early work on the *I Ching* is an example,<sup>3</sup> as is Stelarc's internet 'performance', wherein his electronically agitated body was choreographed, quite literally, by any interested parties who made the decision to key in the relevant co-ordinates on their own computers.<sup>4</sup> Marina Abramovic's performance project where she was kept 'safe' from snakes by a wall of rapidly melting ice is another noted example.<sup>5</sup> Performances where fatigue is part of the fabric of the presentation, seen in the 1980's work of British companies Station House Opera and Impact Theatre Co-



operative, are no less dependent on the training and the intention of the artists involved as any form of practice.<sup>6</sup> Reflexive responses are honed, determined in a multiplicity of ways that separate the performer, or the performative state, from the differently determined spectator. Guy Claxton, Professor of Psychology at the University of Bristol, speaks of reflexivity as something akin to intuition

We say we responded 'intuitively' when a response occurred faster than thought ... there is some evidence that such lightning reactions draw on ... subliminal sources of information.<sup>7</sup>

Artists are 'free' to make work, therefore, not as a result of being divorced from the structures that determine human behaviour, but precisely because they choose to enter into a world where they are able to make performative that choice given to each of us through biography and society.<sup>8</sup> As such, performance practice emerges as the outcome (a much less problematic term than 'product') of an always specific and individual response to a great body of determinants. The artist operates through choice, and the choices available are no more or less determined than the impetus and ability to work through the choices made.

**20-9-97**

*Caveats* abound. It does not negate the claims made only four paragraphs ago to state that the problem is always the *what is* as much as the *how made*. For there is a genuine need to define the potential area of work, not least in a piece of research, a research-outcome, which might realistically expect to be of certain interest to the non (theatre) specialist. To those whose interest is 'creation' rather than that which remains from the process itself. Indeed, whether a clear end to the creative 'process' emerges is something which the process of study, a process borne out through these traces of ink, will wrestle with throughout. I am attempting to



engage with the *what* of performance as a necessary set of rules or conventions for the *what* of the thesis.

The following paragraphs are offered here as a cartography of views, in order that a shared understanding exists between the 'I' of the writer and the eye of the reader. As such, and despite the intrinsic contention of late twentieth century positions on the constituent elements of performance,<sup>9</sup> these views are submitted as preparation of the ground rather than as a persuasive tract; as an indication of this author's intent rather than a statement of authoritative 'fact'. Providing, it is hoped, both a sense of history - unashamedly, a subjectively manufactured history of this writer's own performative determinants - and a point of departure.

This is not an apology. The personally experienced might be regarded as the micro to the macro of more generic phenomena. This thesis is not concerned with discovering rules for all performance, so much as providing a case study of one performance, and of charting key decisions in its development.

It needs to be said at this early stage that the terms 'Theatre' and 'Performance', no less than 'Theatre' and 'Installation' are at times regarded as factions that are competing one against the other. The mainstream in denial of the marginal, the time-reliance of a directed series of events against the seeming elasticity of images located in space.<sup>10</sup> The predictability of the 'Old Guard' set against the progressive spontaneity and irreverence of the 'New'. In setting out the argument thus, my own prejudices are exposed by a choice of words that immediately prioritise newness over age ... whether this prejudice is sustained, compromised or eroded by

the following research is one which, at the time of writing, remains distant and unknown. What is known is that this 'introduction' is possessed of a comparable complexity to that which might be seen to exist in the researched area itself. The introduction also needs to establish what it is that constitutes the 'I' of the researcher.

Is the 'I' specific: specifically male, married (twice), with children (two), occidental, of my age? Or does the 'I' strive for the 'one' of assumed objectivity? If the 'I' is to be recognised and prioritised, does this validity deny that which might be valuable to the 'other' reader: female, single, no children, oriental, older? What is the researcher's agenda? If that which is subject to study has already formed part of the researcher's own experiences, to what extent does the past prejudice the present examination? To this end, we need to know whether this prejudice (for prejudice there surely is) is accidental and inevitable or deliberate and contrived. As the facilitator of a practical project as part of this process, am I regarding myself as a researcher/practitioner or as a practitioner whose work is then made subject to a written evaluation? In making a piece of work which, at least in part, is being *created* for the process of its own analysis, to what extent is the (my) inclination towards the theoretically interesting rather than in the direction of the theatrically efficacious? With such an overtly stated example of practice-as-research as is offered here, the informed reader will generally expect theoretical positionings to emerge from the practice. Indeed, one could say that this is the aim of the thesis *per se*, and, to a large extent, that will be the pattern here. However, as a full-time lecturer in Drama and Theatre, the world of theory could also be seen



(and not least by myself) to be driving the practice itself.<sup>11</sup> The past is a pre-text for the present, in much the same way as the present is a pre-text for the yet-to-be.

The fact that this thesis is concerned with the theoretical explanation of a practical activity might suggest that theory follows practice. The relationship is not this straightforward. The two cannot be isolated in a way that locates one before the other. This project is practical, this thesis theoretical; but the project and the thesis are being made at the same time. This means that theoretical positionings entered into on the page will inevitably impact on the ways that the practical work is made. Theory is not *post* practice and the research entered into for this thesis will not be following behind as some sort of adjunct to the performance it seeks to explain. The practical work is being constructed in the here and now, and it is being constructed by the same person who is constructing the thesis. At its most interesting and/or complex moments the thesis and the practice might be constructed *in the same way*.

Every researcher, regardless of the field, has to work with the knowledge of personal bias; some of this is genuinely unconscious, whilst the remainder is constructively self-imposed. I am confident that a reading of this thesis will reveal evidence of both types. The art of scholastic research - or the researcher's scholarly art - is not so much an attempt to factor out the biases, for this would effectively remove the passionately inquisitive 'I' of the research. Rather, the most potentially useful strategy, and one I intend to adopt, is the development of a stance which, whilst solid enough to last the distance, is not so rigid as to resist the push of clearly oppositional fact.

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As a piece of work intended to articulate the processes through which any findings are arrived at, as work which is concerned with a continuing process of scholarly investigation, the writer (*this* writer) has a duty to the reader to include all relevant material. To expose the footprints that lead to this place. So, the writing details the investigative process. But what is being investigated? How open and uncluttered is the contract between your eye and mine?

The form of this thesis becomes inseparable from its content. The words used are embedded in the processes, both practical and theoretical, that are producing them. As much as the thesis is about the ways of making *At Last Sight* it is as concerned with the ways of recording in words that process of making. All writing can be regarded as autobiographical, inasmuch as all writers will bring something of an autobiographical self to their work.<sup>12</sup> This phenomenon will differ in degree from one writer to another, but authorial presence, shaped by personal history and intent, will remain. To the same extent that the autobiography of *At Last Sight* will be made explicit in the thesis, the thesis itself will foreground the identity of the writer.<sup>13</sup> In this way the thesis is a document of the discursal self. It is a representation of (my) self through discourse.

What will emerge as a feature of this thesis will be a concentration on the writer as well as on the writing. This will not create a denial of academicism. I still feel that scholarly writing is predominantly about thinking something, seeing what other people think about the thing you are thinking, thinking about their thoughts in relation to your own, and then writing what it is that you think. However, this does



not mean that this thesis will develop according to a sequence that is either 'logical' or 'linear'. To write sequentially according to an approved outline undermines the idea of writing as a thinking process, as something responsive, personal and intuitive. Linearity and sequential logic amount to a belief that the words on the page are (no more than) the traces of thoughts already gone. The fact that I am choosing in this introduction to make use of the pronoun 'I' can be read therefore as a statement of intent. The fact that I am choosing in the thesis to record thoughts (almost) as and when they happen is another.

We can develop Clark and Ivanič's ideas of 'writer identity'<sup>14</sup> into the following illustration

**The Discoursal Self**  
My representation of  
myself.

**The Autobiographical Self**  
My Life History.

**My Identity as Writer**

**The Self as Author**  
My sense of 'authority' and  
'presence' within the text.

This illustration is intended to reveal the importance, within this thesis, of a focus on the writer as well as the writing. The term 'text', therefore, stands for the text of the thesis as well as the written text of *At Last Sight*.

The employment of the personal, evidenced in this work, is not intended to function at the expense of a wider, more generic publication of knowledge. The relationship is one of collusion rather than collision, with the necessary critical discourse being at once contained *within* and exercised *through* the product itself. The art-product, the art-event, made as an integral component of this study is unlikely to be so made as to demonstrate its origins to a wider readership than that



which might be assumed from a theatre-specific group. In much the same way, conceptual practice *per se* is unlikely, on its own, to disseminate the specifics of any advancements made. Research which leads in intended ways towards advanced understanding(s) is given credence by its inclusion into new, or newly articulated, ways of working: the process is thus intrinsically developmental and progressive. As art influences art, rather than being hermetically sealed and untouchable, so research influences research. This work is determined by readings, writings, thoughts and actions which were themselves determined by their own creators' histories and influences.

This remains the case even when these same thoughts and actions are not 'published'. Influence is pervasive, and it does not follow that it is the permanently enshrined that affects us most strongly. Snatches of half-remembered conversations may sow the seeds for a lifetime of work, long after heavyweight texts are gone and forgotten.

The ways of making the specific performance in this research-process are individual and at times perhaps idiosyncratic, but this is not to deny the fact (we know that it is as certain as that) that a number of works previously seen, and at times participated in, have had a major influence in the creation of the very 'ways' that make this art my own. That art influenced this art. To those practitioners responsible (and it would be an invidious act to separate some from the group) I offer my appreciation in both the permanence of print and the ephemerality of performance.

Works of performance seen and drawn upon will not feature in the bibliography included at the close of this thesis. The influence is more subliminal than that which might occur when a published text offers those moments of clarity and insight familiar to students of all disciplines. Separating the purposive from the incidental is always a vexed issue in terms of one's attitudes and reactions to art; images that take root in the darkness of the theatre space might not bear fruit until long after the initial image is 'forgotten'. In this way, resonance outlasts reference and the citation of sources becomes either all encompassing or selectively exclusive.

In order for academically oriented ideas to be considered as either insightful or significant, certain criteria will usually apply. A framework exists through which peer-assessment is able to operate according to its own established patterns of procedure. In this way, thoughts about performance, for example, are exposed to critical reflection from experts within the fields of Drama, Theatre, Live Art and Academia. During this process of review by one's peers findings will be tested and an assessment of their critical value will be established. Central to this review is the notion of building on the past; of locating the new within a context of the currently accepted. Theoretical positionings which do not satisfy this criterion will encounter inevitable difficulties in terms of acceptance. The footprints are traced to their starting point, a place where overlaps are recognised as a type of *a priori* qualification, as a probing into the future from the knowledge of the past.

As work created for presentation at major international festivals of staff-directed, student-cast performance, the 'performance' of *At Last Sight* is intrinsically connected to - it is, in fact, designed for - the rigours of this peer-review.



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It will be useful at this point to offer a formally drafted outline for the performance project. This outline, or proposal, has been created in order to contextualise the words contained in this and subsequent sections of the thesis, and also to provide a fixed point of departure for a project which will inevitably deviate from this illusion of certainty. In form, this outline draws upon and develops of Fred McVittie's model as published in relation to his work on the performance, *The Bureau of Internal Affairs*, presented at Manchester Metropolitan University in 1997.<sup>15</sup> The project-outline for *At Last Sight* is located as Appendix 1.

Directors direct: it is a statement of fact. Shakespeare (mentioned once now and henceforth lain to rest) offered us text in the guise of two hours' traffic of the stage. And yet text is no more traffic, in the sense we understand it, than a director of performance is a white-gloved and be-whistled police officer, a keeper of order and shape, a guardian against the rough and the unruly, against the errant and the untoward. Text is not traffic. Text is texture, feeling, tone and colour. The Greeks had a word for it, *lexis*, or diction; the language of the play. The blueprint for performance. One of the seeming cores of this thesis is located at those points where language, the text for *At Last Sight*, is created. At the site where imagination and cognitive thought combine in the formulation of material for presentation, for performance. Where the measurable and quantifiable world of 'reality' and the cavernous potential of the conscious and still subconscious imaginings are coalesced into a third 'created' world of manipulated art; where aesthetic perception is married to an informed (though as yet, and of definition, unformed) state of creative thought.

Some words may be required here on the making of text. Or at least on the making of *this* text. The creation of performative and performable text is an act of metaphor. Emotional connections are sought through the selection and ordering of words in such ways that ‘information’ (in the broadest possible use of the term and including mood, for example, as much as meaning) has the potential to be transmitted to spectators in ways which are recognisable and resonant beyond the sum of their constituent and purely linguistic parts. For the purposes of this study, and also, this writer suspects, as a general principle, text is considered to be at its most ‘valuable’ at those times when it functions, or when it can be *made to function*, as a thing much greater than the representational and descriptive arrangement of ‘meaningful’ words in a coherent and accessible way. What this allows, or *suggests*, to the director of the given text (and this applies no less when the ‘director’ is also the ‘writer’) is a variety of ideas that are not comfortably or effectively communicated through other, less imagistically provocative, means.

A radical, postmodern or in any way deconstructionist approach to the analysis and direction of text (for such, again, exists at or very near to the dual core of this paper) is most often associated with practitioners who work against the reductive and insulating methods of naturalism. This is not to say that no attention is paid to psychology ... psychology might be most adequately described, in these introductory paragraphs, as that which drives the ‘play’: the part-hidden, part-revealed rationale for why things happen. It is important that we recognise this at an early stage and that we do not allow psychology to be appropriated and subsequently ‘owned’ by naturalism.



Reinterpreting or deconstructing the writer's view (if such a thing could ever be identified) is in and of itself more likely to lead to an opening up of the world of the play to a series of reinterpretations by the audience than to closing it down to one shared(?) world view. Indeed, subsequent pages of this introduction will explicitly challenge the very notion of a universally coherent world-view. In so doing, a context for the specific project upon which much of the evidence for this thesis hangs will be provided and made clear.

When directors question rather than prioritise and publicise the playwright's choices, they are not attempting to uncover and articulate the 'truth' that in its own turn would lead to the 'correct' production, making of directing a search for the Holy Grail of authorial significance. The Russian word *zamissel* refers to 'the sense of the whole', the thought or central premise that, in the case of theatre, binds together all elements of a play. Some, perhaps even *most*, directors seek to discover the *zamissel* in the writer's words and in the social history of the play, others seek to find it in their own approaches. For some, like Peter Brook, the director's job is to find the meaning and make it meaningful; for others, like Robert Wilson, 'meaning' is always open, left for the individual members of the audience to discover. One approach works towards and embraces mono-interpretation, one works against it.

Science has taught us that perception is not absolute; it is always relative to the perceiver's notions; with naturalism, the director's perception is fixed and offered to us in that state. Quantum Theory, with its argument that reality is not fixed and

logical but disjointed and in a state of perpetual change, takes us one step further away from naturalism and realism than this.<sup>16</sup> Quantum theory suggests that when we move into the realm of *unconscious thought*, we are, in fact, participating in the creation of reality, we make a leap (a 'quantum jump') from the known into the unknown. When directors engage in processes akin to quantum jumping, they are no longer recreating the playwrights' worlds, they are actively creating new worlds. The 'fixing' of reality (the once only?) into realism (the repeatable!) is, perhaps theatre's truest absurdity and the furthest away from that very 'truth' it seeks to portray.

If the methodology of science can offer only the most approximate description of reality, alongside a generally held understanding that 'reality', such as we understand the term at all, is created by our own personal, prejudicial and learned observations, then how can realism lay claim to the 'real' within its name? If our senses are not to be trusted to give a total and authoritative view of reality, then how can directors of naturalism maintain such a faith in their own, overtly unchallengeable views of the world? If that which we comprehend as the 'real' is only ever in the here and now of the perceiver; if that which has been experienced ceases to be *real* and becomes *memory*, whilst that which is to come (the word, the sentence, the breath after this) is no less ephemeral than *imagination*, then the *unreal* world must always be greater in substance than the real.<sup>17</sup> The fact of theatre's intrinsic *incompleteness* augurs against any directorially imposed fixity. Furthermore, the false attempts to complete, or square, the circle of art (of any art, but for our purposes, 'performance') can only ever (ultimately) serve to exclude



the viewer from the equally intrinsic participation in the elusive and idiosyncratic creation of meaning.

Within the permanent, perpetual present performance offers itself to us as a motif of the referential past and the resonant future: of the 'as was' *via* the 'as if' towards the always elusive 'to be'. An endless present, which, in its time-basedness, keeps pace with the viewer, moving from moment to moment with a shared synchronicity. Theatre convention, regardless of any shockingly unconventional origins it may possess, deals with the past and the future more strongly than the present. In this fashion, that which we know by experience fuels a capacity to imagine that which will probably follow, living through performance in a semi-comatose state of nostalgia and prediction, fused into a knowing sense of departure and arrival. Even the rather peremptorily disabused notion of text as traffic serves here only to take the members of its audience down routes so familiar as to pass in a blur. In opting for the text to take us somewhere, to deliver us unto some climactic *grand finale*, we have to miss the moments, more swift than numbed perception, wherein the text, like the bodies, like the light and shade of all we see, is always already and always only forever in the here and in the now.

Even within the immediacy of performance the words used are generally rooted in either the past or the present. In a performance text one is more likely to say 'I am going for a walk' or 'I went for a walk' than 'I am walking'. It may be the case that to speak of an action whilst it is being carried out is to engage in no more than tautology or contradiction. The speaker is either walking, in which case the words only describe what the spectator is already seeing, or the speaker is not walking, in

which case the words are a type of blind. The text of *At Last Sight*, both in terms of language and action, will attempt to locate itself in the present of performance even as its referent is the part-remembered past.

5-10-97

Criticisms of progressive performance, and this term is used here to describe those practices which attempt, in a variety of ways, to subvert and/or constructively redeploy the traditions of the Euro-American playhouse,<sup>18</sup> might be said to stem from an articulated tension between cultural conservation and popular culture. Between the 'high' art of the permanent text and the 'low' here and nowness of the performance activity. Cultural conservationists will feel, instinctively, that there are clear and hierarchical demarcations between the 'well-made play' and those traces of text left over from performance. This is in much the same way that theatre itself will generally be afforded a higher and more worthy place than work which comes under the umbrella-heading of 'live art'. That there is some sort of naturally arrived at league table of aesthetic experience and activity.

Rather than offering a celebration of the diverse range of aesthetic approaches found in contemporary performance, (mainstream) critics seek to actively discourage the inclusion, in any recognised locus, of any form of practice which contradicts the(ir) traditional notion of 'theatre'. Willis (1990) argues eloquently and persuasively as to the dangers of such an exclusive and endemic view, writing that calcification occurs as a consequence of

... the complete dissociation of art from living contexts. This is where the merely formal features of art can become the guarantee of its 'aesthetic', rather than its relevance and relation to real life processes and concerns: installed in the antiseptic stillness of the museum.<sup>19</sup>



Post-structuralism has taken us some stages nearer to an understanding of the workings of mainstream sensibilities, if not quite providing society (and art) with a key towards its emphatic taking apart.<sup>20</sup> Post-structuralism grew from a formalised empathy with the series of alternative and/or minority groups that emerged during the 1960s. The 'progressive' ethos of this period provided a platform, albeit a fragmented and fleeting one, for these groups' voices; voices which still, despite the impact of post-structuralism, continue to be marginalised in terms of politics and power. What post-structuralist approaches have allowed is the at least quasi-legitimisation and acceptability of a challenge to the white, middle class, heterosexist cultural politics, a politics that implicitly and explicitly enforces the strong and further disenfranchises the weak.<sup>21</sup> Versions of the world from lesbians, gays, diverse cultural and ethnic groupings, alongside a number of increasingly post-colonialist perspectives, have combined to transform 'traditional' ideas as to that which has hitherto been presented as either 'natural' or 'normal' within our society.<sup>22</sup> This transformation has been wrought through a foregrounding of the ideologies at the core of specific representations (and of ideology itself at the core of representation). This has been aligned to an understanding that the notion that all people(s) wish to belong to a 'perfect' western (Euro-American) society of phallogentric heterocentricism is a constructed and destructive myth of Dead White Males, kept in a state of simmering potency by the live white ones.

Notwithstanding the impact of post-structuralism, critics continue to (feel able to) speak as if notions of commonly held views of performance, and of the values there found, are possessed of a currency which exists without any attendant reference as



to precisely who the(se) 'values' relate to, of who those who sit, not in judgement so much as approval, happen to be.<sup>23</sup> When we speak, for example, of aesthetics, of whose aesthetic 'standards' do we speak? Is it the case that 'definitions' (even the word seems sloppy, full of leakage and loopholes) which seek to exclude the plethora of live-arts based activities from the world of 'theatre' are in any way 'natural', or is theatre beginning to broaden its scope in the light of postmodernism's literal post-modernism?

As a method of analysing culture, post-structuralism attempts a destabilisation of our notions of natural, as opposed to 'non-natural', behaviour; to jolt the receiver with a clear reminder that one's view of the world is only ever one's own. For some this is less a reminder than an unheeded (rather than unheard) wake-up call. Our perception of events is determined by a myriad of conscious and unconscious experiences, expectations, moods, gender, age, education, politics, desires, fantasies *et al* as well as, at its most immediately obvious, the location from which we perceive. As such, notions of 'audience', as if such were a single entity of like-minded, like-experiencing and like-responsive automatons, have lost much if not all of their critical appeal.<sup>24</sup>

The spectator is always an active participant in the art's construction, which is not to suggest that the consumption of art emerges organically alongside its creation, but that the subsequent reception by a viewer complements, if not quite completes the process. This recognition of the spectator's constructive role has emerged from a variety of sources, being as central to certain key ideas of post-modernity as it was to Marx, who wrote that



Consumption produces production ... because a product becomes a real product only by being consumed. For example, a garment becomes a real garment only in the act of being worn; a house where no-one lives is in fact not a real house; thus the product, unlike a mere natural object, proves itself to be, *becomes*, a product only through consumption. Only by decomposing the product does consumption give the product the finishing touch.<sup>25</sup>

10-10-97

Marx was arguing from his own historically recognisable perspective, a perspective wherein one might say that 'existence' is being used as a metaphor for 'usefulness'. In this way, the garment achieves its purpose rather than its identity through the act of being worn. Many well-documented examples of performance contradict Marx's views on consumption at the same time as, in the very act of their publication, they achieve something of their own usefulness through dissemination. In 1988 Ulay and Abramovic walked along the length of The Great Wall of China, Abramovic departing from the eastern end at Shan Hai Guan and Ulay walking from the west at Jai Yu Guan. The walk was witnessed and filmed for a fraction of the way but was nevertheless primarily 'unseen' by all but the walker's own perception of her or his walking self. Undoubtedly, the public 'knowledge' of that activity, whether by personal information from the artists themselves or *via* subsequent reportage in video, photograph, essayed analysis or anecdote, can be said to complement the activity, for such was at least part of the purpose of the walk. However, to take the line proposed by Marx that the walk only 'became' a walk by dint of its consumption is to take us back to the schoolchild's favoured debate about the existence or otherwise of the unheard tree crashing to the forest floor. Performance is performance without an additional witness (despite the protestations of much-



cited luminaries such as Augusto Boal)<sup>26</sup> because the performance is always witnessed already by the self.

To a large extent, we are allowed the luxury of locating the spectatorial within the performative because of the work of Grotowski. Grotowski moved from a strong insistence in his early work on the relationship between spectator and performer towards an acknowledgement that the performer/spectator is now internalised within the single body of the performer. Grotowski's trials have provided a significant encouragement to those currently engaged in thinking about this central aspect of theatre and his legacy needs to be noted here.<sup>27</sup>

Spectatorship can never be taken for granted and even relatively recent generalisations, such as those put forward by the influential writer, director and founder of the 7:84 Theatre Company, John McGrath, have been exposed as anachronistic, intrinsically patronising and even pernicious mistruths. His chapter on 'Mediating Contemporary Reality' in *A Good Night Out*, itself the transcript of lectures given at Cambridge University, goes as far as suggesting the 'tastes ... of working class audiences'. According to McGrath "Working -class audiences like laughs"; "Working-class audiences like music in shows, live and lively, popular, tuneful and well-played"; "working-class audiences can also love sentimentality ... they like clear, worked-for results".<sup>28</sup> This desire for an homogeneous audience, twitching in conditioned response like Stelarc's electronically manipulated body, flies in the face of any and all notions of individuality, offering in its stead a vision of a Big Brother art of formulaic matter. Audiences are sophisticated because we live in a sophisticated time and the idea (the ideology) of an absorbent mass



(re)constructing messages transmitted in the fashion of hypodermic art is a fundamentally incorrect reading of what actually occurs.<sup>29</sup> This could be regarded as anomalous to my own argument, in as much as the denying of one perspective (the other) in favour of another (my own) seems to be restrictive. But what is meant to be communicated here is that positions that favour homogeneity are closing work down whereas the ones that deny it are not.

11-10-97

Cultural codes are not only more complex than at any time in the past, they are also much more eclectic. The working-class audience of McGrath's thesis do not read the same literature, eat the same food or watch the same television as each other any more than 'they' think, feel or behave in a uniform way. The members of an audience are not one mass, a like-minded and slavish whole, and the fact that each of them, each of us, is of the genus homo-sapien does not mean that we are not also intrinsically *sui generis*.

If we accept that any reading of any culturally manufactured product, of any art, is an act of interpretation, then we are also recognising that the 'meaning' of the work is interpreted, and, as such, that all meaning is interpretative and personal.<sup>30</sup> Every art product can be consumed in a multiplicity of ways and the ways in which this art is interpreted are subject to innumerable variations of perspective. Meaning can no longer be discussed without referring to the question of *who* reads the work, of *where*, of *when*, of *how*. In this sense, notions of cultural reception, of aesthetics that are inseparable from the vagaries of reading are central to all aspects of this thesis.



We are led here to the question of whether a 'correct' reading of a text (written, visual or performative) can ever be said to exist. The sentiments expressed in earlier paragraphs would suggest that the notion of 'right' or 'wrong' readings is one that has been exposed as false by the rigors of hermeneutic study. This has not always been, and is not always, the case. Gadamer argues a position of moderate relativism, wherein understanding is always one's own. In this way, interpretation is neither 'good' nor 'bad', it simply 'is'. Prejudice becomes a positive force, to the point where Gadamer can claim that

Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they invariably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience.<sup>31</sup>

Prejudices, or 'preconceptions', shape the way we start to view, and any subsequent rationalisation is conditioned by this first response. The circle is thus interactive and anticipatory in nature, with the viewer, the spectator, approaching the object, the performance, with the inevitability of projecting certain meanings onto and into the work. This happens in a variety of ways: the theatre space (or the space(s) designated for the theatre) attended; the price of admission; the dress-code required; the previous work of either the creative personnel involved or the 'theatre' itself; any reviews encountered; one's previous and/or abiding predilection towards certain types of work.<sup>32</sup> Gadamer uses the term 'satisfactory understanding' to describe the end-result of this relationship between that which is seen and the one who sees; referring to a mediation between the author and the reader which nevertheless stops some way short of licensing an infinity of meanings. To Gadamer's mind, the intention of the author plays a considerable part



in this construction of the satisfactory response, and it is expected that a similar philosophical approach will permeate the creation of the 'text' (written, visual and performative) of *At Last Sight*.

Gadamer has his adversaries, notably E. D. Hirsch Jr., who prefers to speak of 'valid' and 'invalid' interpretations. For Hirsch, the job of scholarship is to somehow arrive at the author's own intended meaning.<sup>33</sup> In this way, the 'correct' meaning of, for example, Shaw's *Major Barbara* or Robert Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach* would always lie within their own 'authorial' intention, rather than relating to it, in the Gadamerian sense. Where Gadamer embraces subjectivity, Hirsch favours the assumed objectivity of meaning arrived at through archival evidence and literary, rather than dramatic, excavation.<sup>34</sup> The text is thus a puzzle for the scholar to solve, with, presumably, the prize of meaning as the ultimate goal ... a goal which is only ever attainable by the scholar. Both Gadamer's and Hirsch's positions are exposed and subsequently attacked by the theorist and lexicologist Roland Barthes.<sup>35</sup> For Barthes the author's voice is banished entirely from the equation of meaning, thus

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture .... Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is 'explained' – victory to the critic.<sup>36</sup>



Barthes' approach is not being followed in the creation of the performed work that will be (that already is?) *At Last Sight*. This is not because *At Last Sight* will tread too radical a line for Barthes. It is because I am aware that in the creation of material for an audience, and as a result of my own determinants, I will undoubtedly make choices which have as their intention a preferred response. Tonal and spatial decisions in the directing of the work will endeavour, however obliquely, to result in certain moods and feelings in those who spectate. An appraisal of how this specific text is (being) constructed will follow this introduction in Chapter One; it is salient at this point to relate my own approaches to certain philosophical structures under discussion. It follows that the performance will still exist for any spectator who interprets the work in a different manner to that which this author intends and that her or his response is, by my own liberal definition, a valid one. The ideology of the creator cannot be expressed in the work of art; instead, a process of mediation occurs which amounts to a dialogue between the reader and the read.<sup>37</sup>

**18-10-97**

It is at this point that the critic, or the scholar, comes face to face with the creator. or the artist: the maker of the work which is to be simultaneously exposed to analysis from that same maker. The relationship is a Janusian one in as much as artistic decisions are not made in the same way that critical responses are formed. Critically, I am with Barthes, creatively, I am with Gadamer, albeit with decidedly Barthean leanings. The result is a seeing two ways, with perhaps too little visibility in either direction: the critic is taking the work apart before it is made, in much the same way as the creator is inordinately conscious of the criticism to which the



work will inevitably be exposed. Indeed, the work is being created *for* critical analysis and, to a large extent, it is being created *through* analysis.

This is no mere exercise in linguistic chicanery: the problem is real and pervasive. As a scholar, my role is to go beyond the satisfaction of interpretation. It goes with the territory of teaching in the university sector that I am expected to take my own responses, and the responses of my students, more deeply than a surface reading would allow. To move into an explanation, an analysis, as to why we interpret work in the ways that we do. To articulate the theoretical positionings which result in our 'feelings'. Whereas the practice I create may be able to exist, and to do so comfortably, within a situation which allows the aesthetic ideas contained therein to remain unexplained, my twin role as a lecturer and researcher leads me into a seeking out of identifiable traits, alongside the subsequent dissection, of that which might be termed the nature of contemporary performance.

**19-10-97**

There is more at stake here than a surface understanding of semiotics, an ability to rationalise, both in a directorial and analytical fashion the signification of signs. The realisation that interpretation is always already an act of re-creation stems from the polysemic nature of performance. The codes on which performances are built are complex and, semiotics notwithstanding, the ways in which these codes are deciphered are never absolute.<sup>38</sup> That which Esslin chooses to regard as the exemplification of an 'incorrect' reading is embraced by other 'schools' of practice as an exemplar of a post-semiotic world of polysemia. Italian art critics coined the term *inespressionismo* to describe that art which, through the creation of moments of loaded ambiguity, aspires to a state whereby it means whatever the



viewer chooses it to mean. For those of us who regard the Derridaen idea that things may not mean what their creator intended as an eminently acceptable philosophical positioning, *inexpressionismo*, or inexpressionism, can still seem like a leap into an excess of liberality. In reality, inexpressionism differs very little from the negotiated readings inherent in all forms of communication, with the perceiver incorporating 'intended' and 'accidental' responses to any given subject. As indeterminate works, performances cannot but leave spaces that the spectator will fill in in the process of spectating; the spectator, therefore, fixes *that* meaning in the process of spectatorship. That the work means something else to other spectators, as it will to the creator and any participants, is to be embraced.

Inexpressionism fails as a philosophical as well as a critical phenomenon, ultimately, because of the impossibility of creating an entirely 'open' text: indications always exist, whether they are recognised as such or not. If the text is never open then it follows that subjectivity is always compromised by indications. Performance work in general, and *At Last Sight* is no exception to this rule, draws on the preconceptions of a spectator (and it is important here that we do not fall into the trap of losing the individuality contained in 'a' to the neutrality of 'the'). There is no ideal or idealised watcher and the work must not be made to fit into the lowest common denominator of seeking to be all things to all people. A spectator is guided by the structure of the performance, which suggests that the range of interpretations, although infinite in the subtlety of their variations, is chiefly situated within the artist's version of events.<sup>39</sup> Meanings are suggested, although not demanded, by the rigidity or otherwise of the codes in operation, and these



codes will, for the most part, be manipulated by the artist, by the creator of the work.

Within the construction of the written text for *At last Sight* (which may figure large or not at all in the production *per se*) recognition is given to the fact that ‘texts’, in whatever fashion we choose to utilise the term, will always contain, and subsequently convey ‘meanings’ or indications which lie beyond the conscious intentions of the author.

When writing text, for performance or otherwise, there is an awareness that what one is doing is on one level controlled and on another surprising, almost accidental.<sup>40</sup> Writing, therefore, involves sensitivity to correspondences and resonance even when words have been arrived at without conscious thought. This is not the same thing as automatic writing, made famous by the surrealists and also by Freud.<sup>41</sup> Whereas automatic writing denies the possibility of editorial interference, creative writing *per se* involves a recognition that the act of writing is itself in part a process of discovery, and that new ideas may stem from writing as much as writing functions as the articulation of ideas. There is no fixed sequence in the process of writing, and all that is written is not planned. Indeed, one can write in order to find out what it is that one thinks.

At the time, in the very action, of its being constructed the text will combine a number of potentially contradictory indications, or signifiers, and these will inevitably result in an equally diverse set of responses. My own intentions as writer of this text are still important to the intended meaning, or overall tone, of *At Last*

*Sight*. Notwithstanding the fact that I am writing the words with an awareness of the impossibility of conveying all, and only all, that I intend. In this sense, the work is intended to function with rather than against the ideas of polyphony and polysemia, inasmuch as it is my intention that the text that emerges will contain within it a recognition of the ambiguity of word, voice, gesture, pace and duration. As the text is not yet formed, I should, perhaps, be referring here to the 'I' of the writer rather than the 'it' of the yet to be.

On one level, this would appear to be the proving of an already accepted point: if texts are intrinsically polysemic there might be little point in making polysemia itself a stated aim. However, in my role here as both documenter of practice and practitioner it seems illogical to attempt to make practice which is dispossessed of a theoretical grounding. Indeed, the practice is predetermined to be invested with an underpinning of theory by dint of the conditions of its being made. To try to divorce the 'why' of analysis from the 'how' of creation is impossible to me, at this time, in these circumstances. So, I have located myself in a situation wherein I am aware (of my own belief) that the notion of an author as a free creator of direct and incontestable communication has ceased to operate with any validity. The concept of authorial dominance, of a literal authority, has been subject to searching examination by contemporary critical approaches, to the extent where, perhaps, the most an author is able to do is to make the first suggestions as to the ways in which the work will be perceived.<sup>42</sup> As director as well as creator of the text that will constitute *At Last Sight*, this 'authority' is doubled in proportion to the difficulties inherent in an avowed avoidance of an attempt to 'persuade'.



The ways in which this balance will be sought (if not always achieved) will form the basis of Chapter Two. Chapter Two will constitute an analysis of the practical decisions involved in the crafting of performance with a group of students, from October, 1998 to March, 1999, where *At Last Sight* will be presented in Liege, Belgium as part of an annually held International Festival of University Theatre. This is a feature of the approach I will be bringing to the research. Whereas the pace at which I write Chapter One, as with this introduction, is relatively measured, the pace of Chapter Two's construction will be determined by the development of rehearsals. This is an intentional feature of the research methodology being developed.

**28-10-97**

A feature of writing *about* making at one and the same time that the making is taking place, is that linearity or progression is sacrificed to the immediacy of rehearsals occurring in the midst of reflection. Whether this means that the words of the thesis will be playing 'Catch Up' with the activities of practical creation, or *vice versa*, is something that only experience will reveal. Even now, it is easy to foresee situations where I will be struggling for the words to describe and explain an element of rehearsal that has already been removed and replaced by another. The reader will observe from this that it is not my intention to attempt a separation of 'theory' from 'practice'. That they are indivisible is one of the beliefs that provide fuel for this project. If this results in a not quite coherent experience for subsequent readers, all I can say is that the experience of reading the thesis may be more reflective of the experience of making *At Last Sight* than a more compartmentalised approach could have achieved.



The process of writing this thesis, like the process of creating *At Last Sight*, will draw more heavily on divergent approaches to thinking than to the convergent. This will not be a thesis where the conclusion is the more knowing twin to the introduction. It is not an attempt to find out if a particular theory holds true, so much as it is an attempt at recording and making sense of what it is that takes place, *as it is taking place*. In order to be consistent any processes of revision will be visible and transparent. If this thesis were to be written by hand rather than typed then the reader would encounter a series of crossings out, each of which would leave the displaced words legible. Mistakes and blind alleys are the stuff of rehearsal: the stuff of creating practical performance. Just as mistakes are valuable stages of that process, so are they valuable stages of this. To this end, I will not be deleting sections of this thesis if and when those sections no longer 'ring true'. If something happens in rehearsal that seems important at the time then it will be included and commented upon.

Processes vary from person to person. So do practices. The term 'practice' as it appears in this thesis will refer to more than the practice of a physical act. It will be used to describe the choices made in the putting together of this project. In recognising that a practice is also always a choice I am identifying my own approach as one among a myriad of possibilities. One practice selected from immeasurable practices. We can say that in the context of originality the word 'practice' relates to the idea of prototypicality ... where one engages in a practice that will subsequently serve as a model for others. But practice also relates to employment of existing practices. Ways of making work are shaped by work seen, just as one's own practice is informed by the practices of others. Practice *happens*,



and because it does it cannot stay fixed. Practice then becomes process and *vice versa*. The terms will overlap and fold in each other as the thesis develops ... in the same way that the documentation and the construction of *At Last Sight* will come together to form one project.

11-11-97

As with 'practice' and the increasingly unstable concept of 'the audience', ideas of 'the natural' have been exposed as a series of constructions. The sense and meaning of words such as 'aesthetics', 'art' and 'theatre' have been recognised as culturally and ideologically manufactured. Accordingly, there are no definitions of theatre that exists without an ideological baggage.<sup>43</sup> Recognising theatre criticism in this sense gives us more information as to the ideology of the individual critic than it does the provision of an objective (*sic*) perspective on performance. Ideology is always prevented, excluded, from the notion of 'outside' and nothing experienced can ever be 'new'. Attempts at removing ideology from any given equation are futile in the extreme ... all that can be done is to recognise the prejudice that comes with experience and to acknowledge the exclusivity and bias of one's view. If we choose to examine closely that which we 'recognise' as theatre, we will see that there are few if any common properties in the form; those which appear to be common are only strands of similarity. Theories of what it is that defines 'Theatre' are generally made up of doomed attempts to conceive of as quantifiable and closed that which, in essence, is demanding, always, of an openness of approach. In 1956, at the same time as John Osborne and The Royal Court were initiating 'redefinitions' of British notions of theatre, Morris Weitz was arguing a persuasive case against closure

Aesthetic theory - all of it - is wrong in principle in

thinking that a correct theory and definition of art is possible ..... What I am arguing then, is that the very expansive, adventurous character of art, its ever-present changes and novel creations, make it logically impossible to ensure any set of defining properties.<sup>44</sup>

Attempts to shift notions of Euro-American performance away from the vainglorious belief that this state somehow sanctifies the premise of an essential 'known' have been posited by Grotowski, Mnouchkine, LeCompte, Schechner, Barba, Wilson and even, in his post-Jungian days, Peter Brook.<sup>45</sup> Each of these practitioners (and they are representative of a much larger group) have moved towards forms of performance and performance-related research which have denied both the omnipotence of the literary text and the seeming supremacy of the white males' gaze. Schechner writes that we should

... situate theatre where it belongs; among performance genres, not literature. The text, where it exists, is understood as a key to action, not its replacement. Where there is no text, action is treated directly.<sup>46</sup>

Experimentation in performance, or even deviation from 'normal procedure', has led to a less than complimentary press, from within as well as beyond academe, as Susan Bennett, describing the origins of performance theory, points out

Performance theorists responded to mainstream North American theorists who berated the devaluation or even total rejection of text by performance artists. Traditional theorists saw this as the final straw in the alienation of audiences, sending them to the 'culturally inferior' entertainments of cinema and television.<sup>47</sup>

12-11-97



Dramatic literature has an in-built potential for permanence, which is denied by the ephemerality of performance; this makes the study and analysis of work that is 'performative' rather than 'literary' in origin and impulse an uneasy academic discipline.<sup>48</sup> As we have already seen, cultural conservatism continues to uphold the tenet that there is an indisputable line that divides the 'High Art' of (their) classical, scripted theatre from the 'Low Art' practices of the seemingly undisciplined and, sacrilegiously, 'unskilled' matter of (our) contemporary performance.<sup>49</sup> I am aware here that the use of the inclusive 'our' seeks to inculcate in the reader a certain shared perspective, shared, at least, with the perspective of the writer. I am aware also that in acting thus I am contradicting the ideas of *sui generis* mentioned earlier. Ultimately, the safety of simply deleting the word is sacrificed here in the hope that the reader's eye will recognise it as a desire towards openness, both of location and response. We know, after all, that the "terms of high art are currently categories of exclusion more than inclusion".<sup>50</sup> Terms which, rather than celebrating the rich aesthetic diversity that is a feature of our age, encourage us towards an exclusion of any forms of performance which do not conform to these conceptions. Faced with this recent history, the makers of progressive performance, alongside their band of articulate apologists, have begun to develop theoretical positions ... partly as an inevitable consequence of current developments and partly as a defence, as a shoring-up against attack. My own predilections, in terms of practice and analysis, contextualised in the body-proper of this thesis and also in the *At Last Sight* to be, are towards postmodernism.<sup>51</sup>

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It is important to remember that other forms of progression exist, and that the postmodern approach posited here is only one of a number of ways in to current



work. The non-mimetic performance traditions of African, Asian and Oriental forms, for example, have had a radical impact on the ways work is made in the West.<sup>52</sup> The exposure to the alternative philosophies aligned to these traditions has resulted in an increased questioning of the dominance of European and North American beliefs, from Aristotle through to Stanislavski. More and more, we are seeing an inclination within performance theory towards the hybridity of anthropological and aesthetic interests. With a desire to cross over from the borders of theatre (which, as we have seen are untenable inventions) into other genres of performance: into ritual, ceremony and play. Brooks McNamara makes the point, albeit less forcefully than Weitz, that

Performance is no longer easy to define or locate: the concept and structure has spread all over the place. It is ethnic and inter cultural, historical and ahistorical, aesthetic and ritual, sociological and political. Performance is a mode of behaviour, an approach to experience; it is play, sports, aesthetics, popular entertainment, experimental theatre and more.<sup>53</sup>

The key question in theatre is not 'what is happening on stage?' so much as 'what is happening to me?' Not 'what the butler saw' or even 'what the butler is seeing or might see next' but 'what can I see?' For the 'I' of the reader is inseparable from the 'eye' of the viewer and, just as the eye is never fully fixed, but always flickers, always shifts, so the reading 'I' is in motion from moment to moment, moving at pace with, but never fully in line with, the writing performed and made 'real' as we watch. In this way, art no more imitates life than life could be said to imitate art ... apparent, and even artfully designed similarities are at once both more and less than they may seem



Directors who engage their imaginations towards the creation of new forms and approaches are not so much decrying the real as denying the false. Usually, the production's theatrical images are the result of the director's researched and relativistic perceptions about the play.<sup>54</sup> About a concern with the nature of the play's narrative, characters, ideas and atmosphere; at other times the production tells us more about the director than the directed, more, perhaps, about performance than that which is being performed. The first is primarily interpretative, the second creative. In all cases, whether the production serves the text or the text serves the production, what is necessary is an ability to select and creatively manipulate the diverse elements of performance: (usually) movement, duration, speech, pace, rhythms and design (all of which are contained in a working understanding of semiotics).<sup>55</sup> An aesthetic literacy aids the director in her/his choice of images and/or motifs that have the greatest potential for communicating *at the requisite level* that which the director deems fruitful. To this end, the creation of moments of loaded ambiguity might be more taxing to the director (and ultimately more satisfying to the audience) than the directing-by-numbers of Chekhovian *mythos* after the style (the *school*) of Stanislavski, or Brechtian *dianoia* according to the principles laid down in the *Short Organum*.

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Heiner Muller claimed, famously, that to 'use' Brecht without challenging him was to betray him.<sup>56</sup> Brecht himself argued against the very canonisation of technique that has been used to calcify his own once-innovatory practice. It is worth quoting Brecht at some length on this point. His essay of 1938, entitled *The Popular and the Realistic*, contains the following still timely warnings

The concept of realism ... is an old concept which has been



much used by many men and for many purposes, and before it can be applied we must spring-clean it too .... For time flows on ... Methods wear out, stimuli fail. New problems loom up and demand new techniques. Reality alters; to represent it the means of representation must alter too .... What was popular yesterday is no longer so today, for the people of yesterday were not the people as it is today. Anybody who is not bound by formal prejudices knows that there are many ways of suppressing truth and many ways of stating it ... great experiments in the theatre ... involved the exploding of conventional forms .... One cannot decide if a work is realist or not by finding out whether it resembles existing, reputedly realist works .... The intelligibility of a work is not ensured exclusively by its being written in exactly the same way as other works which people have understood. These other works were not invariably written just like the works before them.<sup>57</sup>

The work that will be *At Last Sight* will amount to the ‘exploding of conventional forms’. Of conventional ideas as well as conventional practice. The work will bring with it more than a ‘spring-cleaning’ of commonly accepted readings of realism. It will investigate notions of ‘the real’, and of how that ‘real’ can survive and function within the artifice of a theatre presentation, for these are ideas which have driven the project to this point and will continue so to do. Ideas are faced here with the additional ‘complication’ of having to deal with and work through whatever personal realities the performers will bring to the performance. This is one aspect of the practice of this thesis. Nothing is assumed and all ideas are to be tested in performance. Ultimately, this striving for ‘real experience’, born of one world, made in another and combining to create yet another in the third and public stage, will underpin the entire project.

**20-11-97**

At this juncture, it is my job, in the literal as well as the metaphorical sense, to ensure that a healthy distance is kept between sentiment and sentimentality,



between the two-facedness of the actor (the aptly named *hypokrite* of classical tradition) and my own desire to tell some kind of 'truth'.<sup>58</sup>

We are dealing now, as ever, with duration and space, with location, with image, sound and form ... with *people*. These are the givens of performance and it is to the creation of performance that this thesis now moves. If this chapter-length introduction has served its purpose, it has prepared the ground for a study of one way of making work; a 'way' which is personal, but which is also attempting to locate itself within a recognisably theoretical and aesthetic frame of reference. In the final analysis, perhaps, the most effective way of discussing the making of performance is to focus, as this thesis intends to do, on a performance which is being constructed at the same time as its construction is being made subject to study. For to do otherwise would result in the alteration of that investigation to an examination of the previously 'made', to a view of performance as a thing already done and complete ... to an object, rather than the event we know it to be.

Whether the relationship in one body of the creator and the critic will prove more fruitful than frustrating remains to be seen, making the analytical aspects of the thesis as much of a genuine leap into the darkness of the yet-to-be as those elements that will remain indubitably performative.



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<sup>1</sup> Cage, J *Silence*. Western University Press, Middletown, Conn., 1967. pp.46-47

<sup>2</sup> It is useful here to refer to the late British artist Francis Bacon. Bacon was insistent, throughout his life, that his paintings were entirely intuitive; that he never drew. A consequence of this was that his art was seen as stemming from an almost mystical and, centrally, an immediate relationship between the artist, the paint and the canvas. The relatively recent 'discovery' (the provenance of which has been challenged in some quarters) by the artist's friend and companion Barry Joule of a vast array of sketched-over and otherwise manipulated photographs, (known as the 'Joule Archive') alongside a series of associated and developmental drawings, gives lie to (t)his claim, suggesting as it does that Bacon was both a dissembler of truth and a systematic assembler of ideas. The scope of this thesis is not wide enough to accommodate any in-depth analysis of the work of non-performance-based artists; however, Bacon's desire for his art, and the 'creation' of that art, to be seen as somehow less 'determined' than that of his peers is worthy of note; it suggests something of the tendency of artists' disinclination to engage in, or even admit to, an analytical engagement with the mechanics of their work. See *Francis Bacon*. Sinclair, A, Marlborough Fine Art, London, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> See *Conversing with Cage*, compiled by Richard Kostelanetz and published by Omnibus Press, 1989. Cage speaks at some length about chance; on page 17 we read the following: "Most people who believe that I'm interested in chance don't realize that I use chance as a discipline. They think I use it --- I don't know --- as a way of giving up making choices. But my choices consist in choosing what questions to ask."

<sup>4</sup> Stelarc's performance of 'Split Bodies: Voltage In/Voltage Out' is discussed in *Total Theatre*, Volume 8, Number 2, 1996 in an article by John Daniel entitled 'Invaded Bodies'.

<sup>5</sup> Information on the work of Marina Abramovic can be found in *Performance Research*, Volume 1, Number 2, 1996 in articles and interviews by Chrissie Iles and Lynn MacRitchie; in *Performance Art Into the 90s*, Art & Design, Volume 9/10, 1994, London; and in *Ulay/Abramovic: Performances 1976-1988*, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> The work of both Station House Opera and Impact Theatre Co-operative is chronicled in the journal, *Performance*, London. This journal has ceased publication; however, back-issues can be obtained by contacting David Hughes at *Live Art Magazine*, PO Box 501, Nottingham, NG3 5LT, England.

<sup>7</sup> Claxton, G. *Investigating Human Intuition: Knowing Without Knowing Why*, in 'The Psychologist'. Volume 11, Number 5, May, 1998. p. 219.

<sup>8</sup> Bohm, D *Causality and Chance in Modern Physics*. Harper & Row, New York, 1958. p.96

<sup>9</sup> Carlson, M *Performance*. Routledge, London & New York, 1996. On page 5 of his introduction, Carlson states that 'performance is an essentially contested concept'.

<sup>10</sup> See Carlson (1996) and Counsell, C *Signs of Performance*, Routledge, London & New York, 1996 for discussions of varying theatre forms and their terminologies.

<sup>11</sup> Since 1985, I have lectured in Drama, Theatre and Performance at Crewe + Alsager College, Edge Hill, Liverpool Polytechnic and University College Chester, as well as running workshops, giving conference papers and creating performances at a number of institutions outside Britain.

<sup>12</sup> See Clark, R and Ivanic, R *The Politics of Writing*. Routledge, London & New York, 1997 for a discussion of the ways in which the self is always made present in one's writing.

<sup>13</sup> Foreman, R *Plays and Manifestos*. (ed. Kate Davy) New York University Press, New York, 1976. p.192: 'All creative work should be about the author trying to CREATE his subject and structure in a way that is necessarily about the person who represents that subject matter .... If the artist is involved in the artwork not only as maker but also its subject, it becomes the study of one who sees himself seeing himself.'

<sup>14</sup> Clark & Ivanic (1997) pp. 135-160.

<sup>15</sup> A report of McVittie's work on *The Bureau of Internal Affairs* can be found in *Performance Practice*, Volume 3, 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Stapp, H *The Tao of Physics*. Boulder Press, Colorado, 1975. p.136

<sup>17</sup> Bridgman, P *Reflections of a Physicist*. Philosophical Library, New York, 1950. p.108

<sup>18</sup> Progressive performance might be further defined in its adversarial relationship to cultural conservationist notions wherein practice is rooted firmly in those traditions of preservation rather



than challenge; where the literary text is always more central, more important, than the act of performance itself.

<sup>19</sup> Willis, P. *Common Culture*. Open University Press, Milton Keynes, UK, 1994. p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Post-structuralism is generally held to have arrived in the USA in 1966 at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, with the participation of Barthes, Derrida and Lacan at the Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man conference. A detailed study of the differences, and points of overlap, between post-structuralism and postmodernism can be found in Madan Sarup's *Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993. For the purposes of this thesis, post-structuralism is regarded as a critical tool for unlocking aspects of the world we live in, whilst that world itself is fundamentally postmodern. In this way, post-structuralism can be identified as that which has an emphasis on the workings of power; it functions as an interrogation of the power-bases of discourse and also as an interrogation of the power bases that support these discourses.

Every decision is also something of a loss. In choosing to stress 'postmodernism' as a critical term I am in danger of conflating postmodern and post-structural ideas into something that bleeds in all directions. This is a deliberate choice. Just as the postmodern condition involves the rejection of fixed conceptions so the postmodern condition itself cannot remain fixed.

<sup>21</sup> *Voices for Change* (1993) ed. Lawrence; specifically, Neelands, J. 'The Starry Messenger', which contains a thorough analysis of post-structuralism within a context of drama pedagogy.

<sup>22</sup> Post-Colonialism is defined by Mark Fortier as that which offers a "challenge (to) the canon of western art, a challenge which takes myriad forms, from out-right rejection to reappropriation and reformulation." (*Theory/Theatre*. Mark Fortier, Routledge, 1997. p.131). According to Fortier, post-colonialism is an attempt "to describe the contemporary situation and its culture ... by focusing on the effects of the western imperialism which has dominated the world since the sixteenth century." (*ibid* p.130).

<sup>23</sup> I am referring here to theatre critics such as Michael Billington and Benedict Nightingale in mainstream newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *the Times*, whose reviews of performances are dominant in British culture.

<sup>24</sup> Freeman, J 'The Location and Theory of Looking' in *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*. Spring, 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Marx, K and Engels, Frederick, *On Literature and Art*, Moscow: Progress. Published in translation, 1976.

<sup>26</sup> Boal, A, in *The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*. London, Routledge, 1995, argues that theatre demands two people, a passion and a platform.

<sup>27</sup> See particularly Kumiega, J. *The Theatre of Grotowski*. Methuen, London, 1985.

<sup>28</sup> *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form*. Methuen, London, 1981. pp. 36-60.

<sup>29</sup> See Bennett, S *Theatre Audiences*. Routledge, London & New York, 1992.

<sup>30</sup> 'By interpretation I mean here a conscious act of the mind which illustrates a certain code, certain 'rules' of interpretation.' Sontag, S *Against Interpretation*. Anchor, New York, 1988. p.5

<sup>31</sup> Gadamer, H. G. *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (1976). London, University of California Press. p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> See Beckerman, B *Theatre Audiences*. Routledge, London & New York, 1993.

<sup>33</sup> See the section on Hirsch in Bateman, A *Philosophy of Art*. Routledge, London & New York, 1997.

<sup>34</sup> Hirsch's views on interpretation can be found in *Validity in Interpretation*, 1967. London: Yale University Press; and *The Aims of Interpretation*, 1976. London: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>35</sup> See *Image, Music, Text*. Roland Barthes. Fontana press, London, 1977, particularly the chapter entitled *The Death of the Author*, pp. 142-148.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*. pp. 46-147.

<sup>37</sup> See Bauman, Z *Intimations of Postmodernity*. Routledge, London, 1992.

<sup>38</sup> See Esslin, M *Fields of Drama*. Methuen, London, 1992 and Eco, U 'Between Author and Text' in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. Collini, S (ed.) Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992.

<sup>39</sup> Bennett, S (1992)

<sup>40</sup> Clark & Ivanic (1997) pp. 165-173



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<sup>41</sup> Notwithstanding its legacy of visual art, surrealism began with experiments in writing as a means of pursuing 'pure psychic automatism' in its art. See Breton, A *Manifestos of Surrealism*. (Huntington, J trans.) Penguin Press, London, 1987.

<sup>42</sup> See Barthes (1977).

<sup>43</sup> See Carlson, M (1996) pp. 8-16

<sup>44</sup> Weitz, M, in *Philosophy Looks at the Arts: Contemporary Readings in Aesthetics*, ed. Joseph Margolis, revised edition. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978. p. 122.

<sup>45</sup> See *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader*. Huxley & Witts, Routledge, 1996 and *Twentieth Century Theatre: A Sourcebook*. Drain, R, Routledge, 1995. Each of these texts provides the reader with an overview of performance that locates the work of these named practitioners in an ongoing context of development.

<sup>46</sup> Schechner, R. *Performance Theory* Routledge, London. 1988. p. 28.

<sup>47</sup> Bennett, S (1992) p. 28.

<sup>48</sup> See Clark & Ivanic (1997) for a discussion of the ways in which the permanence of printed words brings with it the implication of authority, and how this, in its own turn, is celebrated in conventional approaches to academic study.

<sup>49</sup> See David Hornbrook, notably *Education in Drama*, Falmer Press, Brighton, England, 1991, and 'Can we do ours Miss?' in *Drama and Theatre Teacher*. Volume 4, Number 3, 1992.

<sup>50</sup> *Common Culture*, Paul Willis. Open University Press, Milton Keynes, England, 1990. p. 173.

<sup>51</sup> Whilst Philip Auslander is able to cite Andy Grundberg's declaration that 'postmodernism is dead' in his introduction to *Presence and Resistance* (University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1994. p. 1) I am not yet ready to throw in the towel on postmodern performance as the still-vital performance mode of our time. A number of texts are contained in the bibliography to this thesis that will provide the reader with an overview of postmodern performance. Of these Birringer (1991), Kaye (1994), Wheale (1995) and Auslander (1994) are perhaps the most informative.

<sup>52</sup> See Schechner, Turner and Barba.

<sup>53</sup> McNamara, B, in *From Ritual to Theatre; The Human Seriousness of Play*. Victor Turner. PAJ Publications, New York, 1992.

<sup>54</sup> See Morrissey, H *Directing*. Methuen, London, 1988.

<sup>55</sup> See Esslin (1992) and Eco (1992).

<sup>56</sup> Muller, H *Germania*. Rathbone, London, 1990. p. 37

<sup>57</sup> Brecht, B, from *The Popular and the Realistic* (1938, reprinted in *Brecht on Theatre* ed. and trans. John Willet, New York: Hill and Wang, and London: Eyre Methuen, 1964), pp. 108-110, 111, 112.

<sup>58</sup> By 'truth', I mean here something similar to the reading offered by Peter Barry: 'when we claim that something is true we are not measuring it against some external absolute standard, but by internal rules and criteria which operate only within that designated sphere .... These have a restricted applicability, just like the rules which govern moves in a game.' Barry, P *Beginning Theory*. Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995. p.92. Like Barry, I am dealing here with an idea of truth which is true *within its sphere*.



# Chapter One

4-1-98

## To the Reader

It is here a book of good faith, reader. It warns you, right from the outset, that I here envisaged no end other than a domestic and private one. Here I in no way considered your interests, nor did I look to my own glory. Such a project lies beyond my powers. I have destined my book to serve as a certain comfort to my parents and friends: having lost me (which, indeed, they soon will) they will find here not a trace of my condition or humors, and thus will cherish more wholeheartedly and vividly the knowledge that they have had of me. Had it been a matter of seeking the world's favor, I would have adorned myself better, just as I would have presented myself in a more studied manner. I wish to be seen here in all of my simplicity, quite natural and ordinary, without effort nor artifice: for it is myself that I paint. Insofar as respect for the public will allow, my flaws will be readily legible here as will be my artless shape. For had I found myself amidst those nations that are said yet to live under the gentle freedom of the first laws of nature, I assure you that I would more than gladly have painted myself here in my entirety, and completely naked at that. Thus, dear reader, I am myself the subject of my book.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will analyse the creation of a written text, *At Last Sight*. This text is being constructed in advance of meeting and commencing collaborative practical work with a group of Year 3 undergraduates on the Drama, Dance and Theatre Studies pathway at University College Chester. At this stage, it is impossible to predict with any accuracy the size or personnel of this group. Following election of a triple-module in Research and Production for Performance, students from this cohort are able to choose between a number of projects proposed by members of academic staff in the department. Year 2 students are able to 'join' these project groups, but only as a single-module assessment commencing in April 1999. Year 3



students work in their groups from the start of October through until performance at the university in May. Owing to the fact of my intention to 'preview' *At Last Sight* at a theatre festival in Liege as early as March 1999, it is unlikely that this particular project will involve students other than those in Year 3. The invitation to Liege also means that there will be a shorter period of rehearsal than other projects at Chester will be afforded, and this, in part, has lead me to the decision to create a written text in advance of the commencement of the rehearsal period.

And yet this is only part of the story. The text is also being created as a means of suggesting something of both content and form in order to channel my own processes of thought into the project at an advanced date; of providing a focus for creative planning. Whether this will make the rehearsal period more of an experience of interpretation rather than devising is something which, I suspect, will develop into a process much more vague and elastic than this polarisation would suggest. Why *At Last Sight*? The title itself provides a play on words that interests me, being suggestive, as it is, of a final act of seeing and also of the processes of vision arriving after some delay. Both aspects seem to be in accord with my intention to create a piece of work which is, broadly speaking, nostalgic in content and visual in form. I want the work, or let me say at this stage that I *feel* the work, to be elegiac in tone; to deal with loss. There are reasons, which are becoming increasingly apparent to me, as to why this should be so. Although, as a divorced and subsequently remarried man, it may be the case that certain members of an audience who know something of my own personal background (which will be true to varying degrees in both Liege and Chester)<sup>2</sup> might make the assumption (my own philosophical positioning as outlined in the introduction denies the prefix



'mistaken' here) that this loss relates directly to feelings for my ex-wife. In fact, as later sections of this chapter will seek to establish, these feelings are centred on the absence of my two children, both of whom reside with my ex-wife in the former marital home, rather than with any absence of a 'partner'.<sup>3</sup>

I am not entirely unaware of in how bizarre a fashion these opening paragraphs may read, particularly in the context of a scholarly probing towards a transferable advancement of knowledge. Ominous hints of a confessional tone, of a desperate striving for an unqualifiedly cathartic experience for the artist, may, if you will pardon the bastardised metaphor, set alarm bells ringing in the ears of the reader, and rightly so perhaps. But I would not wish the simplicity of the language used here to detract from the contribution these sentiments can offer to the sense of the overall thesis. A feature of this thesis will be the way in which notions of participatory performance research will be developed. Because the researcher is, in this case, also the researched it is important that the reader is made aware of this factor.

The importance of this relationship cannot be overstated. It provides a key to the ways in which research methodologies will be implemented and it creates a context within which subsequent conclusions can be located.

**16-1-98**

There is an issue of catharsis at work here, and it is, at least in part, made up of a concern for my own notions, flawed and imprecise though they be, of a sense of (or a hoping for) a form of redemption through art. As a teacher of and also a maker of performance, it follows that this is the *type* of art through which I will

pursue this aim. Although the specificities of performance, in terms of its relationship to 'other' forms, make performance an often less than ideal platform for the working out of one's own personal demons.<sup>4</sup>

19-1-98

The material of drama is mediated in ways that other arts do not have to contend with. Music can be played and preserved according to its composer's wishes ... s/he may even play the instruments required; an artist can leave marks on a canvas that remain *as those marks* regardless of the shifting perspective of the viewer. With performance, however - and this is one reason why so much of that which has come to be known as live art is non-collaborative to the point of self-obsession - the work is mediated *through* the performer. The 'creator' or the instigator of that work is rarely seen within the performative frame. There are a number of noted examples which challenge this general principle. Of these, the late Polish theatre director, artist and designer Tadeusz Kantor is one of the most highly regarded. Kantor 'controlled' the performances of his work by the simple and engagingly effective device of positioning himself on stage for the duration of the work, haranguing the audience as well as the actors whenever he felt so inclined.<sup>5</sup> Without anticipating at this stage any similar methods of locating myself within the presentation of the performed product, I am attempting to locate the work as 'my own' (my own sense of 'truth'?) rather than as something which might be seen to 'belong' to the group of performers. This remains the case despite the fact that these same students will doubtless play a large part in the offering of suggestions and the making of decisions, which are themselves a recognisable part of the fabric of even the most dictatorial of rehearsal processes.<sup>6</sup>



*At Last Sight* is a project which will attempt to deal with the aestheticisation of memory. This memory (or these memories) will be 'real' (at least in origin) on the part of the writer/performers/creators involved in the initial stages, and/or with the memories of those who will eventually assume their own actively interpretative role as spectators of the work. The text will demonstrate an interest with the issues of narratology, with evidence of both narrative and narration. It might be useful to refer here to the text, inasmuch as it has been constructed up to this point, as being informed by a process of meta-narratology, of narrative which functions within an active and visible state of change.<sup>7</sup> The way that narrative is treated within the text is therefore a complex one, and the relationship between that which can be recognised as contributing more or less directly to the narrative *per se* and the disembodied extracts of material that exist elsewhere in the work is consistently shifting. *At Last Sight* does contain an allusion to meaning, and yet the structures through which stories are told are subverted too often for a through-line to emerge with any clarity. 'Real' time and 'acted' time are as likely to be alternated without expressed intention in much the same way that the text itself will drop in and out of different European languages. In a similar fashion, memory and fiction, experience and invention, vie for the position of prime potency.

27-1-98

There is a distinction to be made here, which relates to the process of memory itself and also to its twin, 'remembering'; it is a distinction, suggested initially by Freud, between remembrance, *memoire involontaire*, to use Freud's term, and memory, or *memoire volontaire*.<sup>8</sup> Whilst memory serves to put the past into some semblance of chronological order, absorbing that which is being remembered into a deliberate continuum, which locates the distant past at one end and the present at



the other, remembrance destroys the separation of past and present. In other words, at those moments when images from the past are set off or triggered by sensations which are being experienced in the present, remembrance manages to fuse the past *with* the present. In this way the linear continuity that is generally seen, *via* memory, to exist between past and present is taken apart, deconstructed. Linear time is no longer then accepted as a given of tradition so much as its destruction becomes an accepted fact. Time that was lost may in this way no longer seem to be so, for through remembrance that past is not made subject to an act of revival but one of renewal. A consequence of this is that the notion of theatrical tradition is exposed to scrutiny.

That which is commonly known as 'breaking with tradition', however, is not really what is happening here. Performance consists of a series of broadly recognisable conventions, and conventions are the stuff of tradition. Inasmuch as progressive practitioners seek to free themselves and their work from the shackles of tradition - as convention as the dread conventional - those practitioners do so by locating their own approaches within the world of other, similarly minded artists. Thus, one set of traditions is exchanged for another. What this means is that radical developments, original productions, are rare.<sup>9</sup> The progressive practitioner is engaged in a dialogue not with the past so much as with her or his own interpretations of the past, alongside that of a host of other practitioners. What happens is that the 'fixed' sequence of the past is challenged; indeed, the very idea that the glories of the past can be preserved in new work by the inculcation in any one member of an audience of memory as reverence is attacked by progressive performance practice.<sup>10</sup>



Talk of the past leads to talk of linearity, of a narrativised understanding of time, which, in its own turn, and despite best intentions to the contrary, threatens to translate the fleeting present into a point of stability, of closure. If a type of contradiction is beginning to emerge in the idea of *At Last Sight* between that which might be regarded as an interrogation of performative form and a romanticised and quasi-factual use of content, then so be it. Subsequent paragraphs will seek to explore the reasons behind the text's seeming obsession with time and with loss. For the moment all that can be said is that the content and the form are not so easily separated out as may at first have appeared. The *doing* is inextricably bound up with the *to be done* and that which appears as antithetical is an inevitable consequence of making work to exist initially in a literary form, which will then be presented as part of a live performance.

Ideas of the past, in whatever ways that 'past' is treated, are only ever accessible through acts of detailed and deliberate excavation; it has become a feature of our time and of our art that narration itself has been replaced to a large extent by quotation.<sup>11</sup> Within this spirit, extracts of other writers' published words are freely integrated into the text of *At Last Sight*, creating a text which I have no hesitation in regarding as my own.<sup>12</sup> Recent performance practices, let us say recent *postmodern performance practices* in particular, have been characterised by their inclusion of quotations from the past;<sup>13</sup> furthermore, this 'past' has tended to be treated with a relative dispassion, with a sense of a curious and always (oh so) cool detachment. Accordingly, the past seems to be taken further away from the present through the form of its revisitation than the sometimes-scant years between the



particular past and our specific present would suggest. Stripped of its authenticating powers, of its authority, the past has become the stuff of fragmentation, quotation and collage. We know this as the very stuff of postmodernism, of a blatant end to the foundations of history; what it also heralds is a potential end to the notion of story itself. The new tradition is therefore an intensely self-conscious one, relating to the shifting present rather than the fixed past. Stripped of its role as an agent of authenticity, narrative has emerged as a system of coerced delusion. It reads to us now as a system which, in favouring the bogus *there and then* above the actual *here and now* seeks to submerge the truth of experience beneath the intrinsic falsity of empathetic absorption.

This does not mean that *At Last Sight*, any more than the flimsiest postmodern performance itself, is simply a question of citation as art. For unless the past is brought into the present through a process of metaphorical imagination, through imaginings which remove both past and present from within notions of linearity, allowing their common or salient features to emerge, then there can be no sense of renewal. This is the central challenge to *At Last Sight*, both in terms of text and performance. The postmodern 'values' to which I am drawn seek less to 'renew' the past than to parody it. In so doing, a mockery is made of the idea that the act of quotation is more of an 'honest and truthful' process, by dint of its status as a presumably untampered with reality, than that which is being presented in a narrativised and hence fictional way. At a time when the past can no longer be fully believed in, perhaps the only authenticity available to postmodernism is that fragments of that past are able to speak to the present in the form of quotation, of inverted commas around everything. The resultant degree zero flattens everything



out to the level of art as ironic disenchantment, which is neither the tone nor the tenor required for *At Last Sight*. In fact, we know that nothing that is framed by art can ever speak for itself, and that an absence of mediation is impossible within the intrinsically and knowingly mediated form that is public performance.

Art that seeks to renew the past needs to somehow put that past into a type of order: to engage in an act of discrimination. The act of citation, almost by its very nature, denies that activity of discriminatory ordering, replacing an ordering of the past with an uncritical acceptance of the present as a framework within which any number of interest-arousing soundbites from our cultural past can be chaotically placed. Thus, music from the cartoon characters *Tom and Jerry* is as likely to be utilised as snippets of dialogue from *Gone with the Wind* and Adolf Hitler's speeches. All can be relocated alongside each other in the name of a polysemia which is (all too) often no more than a blasphemous reincarnation of Duchamp's notion of 'found objects'.<sup>14</sup> This cannot really fail to mislead us into a belief that the past is an easy state for performance to acquire. Furthermore, in making the selections from this endless back-catalogue on the basis of immediate interest rather than any potential for metaphorical value, selective eclecticism is sacrificed to pluralism, to the new lowest denominator of a performative 'anything goes'.

### 29-1-98

It is for this reason that the text of *At Last Sight* is being constructed within a framework that includes realism as well as postmodernism. This seems, at face value, to present the work with an insurmountable contradiction. For realism is

postmodernism's fiercest opponent and *vice versa*.<sup>15</sup> However, it is my intention in this project to use a type of realism in order to expand on the structures and the composition of earlier, more traditional notions of realism, in the same way that postmodernism feeds off itself with a voracious appetite.

Whether this 'appetite' is self-defining or self-defeating is a moot point; what matters is that *At Last Sight*, like all work, will look backwards and forwards at one and the same time. In seeking to escape the recent past of modernism, contemporary performance tends to utilise a self-conscious method of playing off its past inheritance, its golden traditions, against its current desire for the topical. Indeed, within the extended framework of the knowing work and the knowing audience, the play of past and present actually *creates* the topicality. This does not amount to a value judgement on the work of others, for judgements based on categorisation have no real place in the pages of this thesis. Ironic postmodernism is as capable of creating an efficacious theatrical form as any other working practice. All that is being attempted in these paragraphs is a bringing to the reader's attention of some of the reasons why postmodernism will inform *At Last Sight*, without that same text conforming to any fixed notions of postmodernism.<sup>16</sup>

There is a point to bear in mind here about issues of innovation - about Brecht's 'exploding of conventional forms' - because a contradiction exists between the modernists' commitment to finding new ways of articulating new ideas and the postmodernists' comfortable and incessant pillaging of the innovations of the past.



Even at their most highly subversive, postmodernists feel able to draw upon past forms and past traditions, using a process of re-framing rather than re-invention.<sup>17</sup> What this means is that a view exists within the elasticity of postmodern approaches to performance that the subversion of theatre form cannot be entered into without utilising in some ways the very forms which are being placed under attack. In this fashion, it follows, inasmuch as an interest in postmodernism is informing the work, that *At Last Sight* will not be less concerned with form than a more overtly modernist piece might be as it will reveal a concern with form in a slightly different way. A characteristic of the written text and of the subsequent performance will be a quasi-theoretical type of self-consciousness relating to the particularities of the modernist practice that it is seeking to displace.

#### 4-2-98

The danger (or at least one of the dangers) in this approach is that what has come to be regarded as crucial to postmodernism is an ironic distancing. A sophisticated and elitist understanding, which, in its refusal to engage fully with the form, may result in a corresponding lack of engagement from a spectator. How to *engage* spectators, without providing those elements of *denouement*, characterisation and climax that have become the staples of drama is a challenge that *At Last Sight* will have to rise to. Failure to do so will (within my own sense of what the piece will be) amount to an inadequacy. Theory may be driving the project, at least to a degree, but it is performance, *within the context of a festival of theatre*, that the project is being driven towards. The responsibility of providing the students involved with the work with at least something of the presentational satisfactions they are seeking is as real as the responsibility to make the work demanding of



their faculties of intellect, creativity and emotion. As such, issues of sharing are central to *At Last Sight*.

This is not about a dilution of my own creative and intellectual ownership of the work. It is a recognition that the nature of performance is collaborative and that the imperative to create a positive situation for the participating students is strong. My own role here as student and teacher is no less complex than my role as maker of the work and reader of that which is made. The situation is of my choosing. It is not a question of compromise, nor is it a matter of reneging on my directorial responsibilities. I am working within a set of circumstances, each of which I was aware of before commencing work on this project.

There are dangers, and the one that threatens me most directly, is that of academicism, of a gnawing sense of sterility. This can occur when forms which have been stripped of the commitments and beliefs that fostered them continue to be used. Postmodern performance is naturally responsive to the availability and accessibility of the past of modernism, and, in the way that it attempts to divide that past from this present it runs the risk, in my hands certainly, of indicating little more than a particular type of adherence to a moribund form. In this way, postmodern tendencies are repeated rather than developed and the work wallows in its sense of a partially concealed homage to other work seen.<sup>18</sup> This is linked in some ways to the issue of sentimentality. By 'sentimentality' I refer here to the prompting of familiar responses to equally familiar stimuli; to the risk of evoking responses which are less about the creation of fresh challenges than they are, or become, a series of nostalgic references to previously experienced and only slightly



re-packaged sensations. This can be seen as one of the defining features of reactionary art, which is not the intention of the work made as part of this investigation into the documentation of a particular practice. What needs to be avoided is a surrendering of the impulse to make new work to the familiarity of received notions of 'acceptable' or 'appropriate' performance.

The irony here is that the desire to create new work which stands outside of and at a distance to any invidious comparisons with mainstream theatre, and which aims instead to be measured in accordance with its own 'situatedness' within a localised and transient sense of that own newness, can only ever fail. It does so because, ultimately, all performance, like all art, is judged on the same scale. It competes for our interest and for our approval and in so doing the theatre past to which the bulk of those who make and see new work in the West are all conditioned by and to, sets standards that performance art can subvert but never fully escape.

A difference between 'new' work and 'old' then may not be so much a question of those formal qualities of style which we all have come to recognise as 'postmodern', so much as a feature which resides in the ways in which memory is treated. As a feature rather than a rule, progressive performance indicates a refusal to rely on memory, and in so doing it identifies itself as being in vigorous opposition to the repetition of comfortably established forms. When quotation is offered *as* remembrance we are simply substituting repetition for parody. That which memory is unable to renew, quotation cannot fully revive, the act(ivity) of remembrance is more reliant on metaphor than the installation of quotation within performance (to the point where we are now becoming accustomed to seeing

subsequent quotation marks placed *around* the first quotation marks) will generally allow.

18-2-98

If the past is/was a lie then the present can be regarded in some ways as a cure - as the antidote of honesty or the therapy of recognition - and this 'cure' is made manifest in the fashion of self-narration. This leaves us with two ways of dealing with that narration. We can either collapse away the distinctions between narrative and meta-narrative, writing ourselves into the wider world and exposing the act of writing as we do so. Or we can elevate the fragmented and partial narratives of our own lives to a point whereby those lives are presented as things of considerable importance.<sup>19</sup> Whichever option we choose, it is clear that the idea of narrative itself has not disappeared. The text of *At Last Sight* is comprised of a blending of the first option with the second. It is a feature of our age that lives are being increasingly lived in ways which seek to make the present little more than an endless number of narratives to be told in the future of the past. Derrida has identified this feature as 'archive fever',<sup>20</sup> as a sense of writing a future story out of current deeds. What this results in is a type of *mimesis* in reverse, a condition wherein our lives begin to imitate the stories we read and see rather than the *vice versa* of stories which attempt to relate to our lives.<sup>21</sup>

We can take this further and suggest that this leads us into a new definition of interpolation. One that not merely engages with the process of locating the viewer into and within the narrative being played out on the stage, through a type of identification based on the specificities of cultural targeting rather than the 'mankind-inducing' empathy, but which eliminates the need for identification *per*



se. The spectator is propelled into the spectacle precisely because the spectator *is* the spectacle. If our own lives are being lived increasingly as stories, then we might well ask what need we have of additional, performatised narrative forms. And yet the opposite is the case: in essence, we have reached the stage where we do not really believe things to be 'true' until such time as they have been narratologised and archived, re-packaged into news bites and dramatisations.<sup>22</sup>

23-2-98

*At Last Sight* will tread an uneasy way through all of this, as neither declared fictionality nor ironic imitation, as neither realism nor postmodernism, an attitude to the authority of representation is not simply 'out there' waiting for the taking. The attitude has to be created alongside and as part of the process of making the work. There is a curious type of mimetic referentiality going on here, because in highlighting the nature of narrativity the work becomes intrinsically intertextual.<sup>23</sup> Without relating directly to 'other texts' it nevertheless invites a contemplation of the fact that the past is not being shown *as it was* so much as *how it is being represented*. This demands knowledge of, aligned to an interest in, the procedures of performative representation, an interest, in fact, in a view of performance as a state wherein ideology and representation are inseparable elements. It is worth reiterating the fact that, certainly within the pages of this thesis, and possibly as a general rule, the ways of making performance are inextricably linked to that which is being made performative. The form *is* the content and the content *is* the form, and we are unable, or unwilling, to separate out the teller from the tale.

That the text of *At Last Sight* will not be *the* text for *At Last Sight* is becoming clearer in the writing of this chapter. It is beginning to feel as though that text



should certainly be included, although that inclusion should sit somehow apart from the body of the work. This is a curious phenomenon: in writing the lines that I am, my mind is being drawn away from an analysis of *what* the work will seek to do and towards an appraisal of *how* the work under discussion will be used, of how it might 'fit'. It seems in many ways as though the text is beginning to explore, at least to a certain extent, the paradox of my own history. It is at once both 'real' and 'fictional', both discursive and intuitive (some sections of the text are ostensibly 'crafted', whilst others are written as a sort of stream-of-consciousness). The text is subjective inasmuch as it draws attention to its own (to my own) narrative voice in a variety of ways. It is possessed of a form of self-reflexivity that will seek to break with the illusion of narrative at the same time as it hopes to absorb viewers into its own created world. It locates something of my own history as an exercise in creative writing and much that was experienced first-hand is deliberately offered up in the guise of fiction.

**27-2-98**

We can recognise here certain sites of something I am going to call a doubling of enunciation. This refers to those elements within the text of *At Last Sight* which are characterised by instances of *deixis*, a use of language that refers to the writing agent ... to the writer. The sites of enunciation create a linguistic pattern, or a network, that attempts to articulate the concerns of *making* which exist both on and beneath the surface of the work. If the instances of narrative and the constants (?) of mood create a consistency within the text, then so does the self-reflexivity of the writing itself. As a result of this, a reasonable expectation can exist that a spectator will be able to adopt a manner of viewing, a mode of receptivity that recognises and accommodates the particularities inherent in the presentation of this



type of text. The written text is seeking to provide a series of words which are a *part* of the very performance text that they provide comment on. In a sense then, the content of the scripted text will be intrinsically embroiled in the enuncitative fabric of the performance, at the same time as it also exists as a cohesive appendix to it. A consequence of this is that the words contained in the written text offer to the spectators both content and context. Creating an early indication of the performance's intention to reflect on an absence of artifice alongside the overtly artificial, to display the process of making (the *then* and the *now*) within the immediacy of the made.

**28-2-98**

If the making is part of the made, so too is the self an integral element of the subject. What then is involved in the process of writing the self into text for performance? Am I writing *about* myself or am I writing the (a) self? These questions are being played off against each other just as they are also working in close accord. What is of interest, to me, initially at least, is the relationship for a spectator between that which is encountered as written text - 'I am myself the subject of my (work)', to paraphrase the Montaigne of this chapter's introduction - and that which is subsequently or simultaneously offered as performance. To what extent that which is seen will contradict that which is heard is, at present, unknown, perhaps even unknowable; what is 'known' is that it is in this exchange between these two quite separate semiotic elements that a defining tension within the overall work is expected to exist. I have no clear rationale as to why I am drawn at this point towards an exploration of my self; neither do I have any real sense of whether the self I offer is a 'true' one. As Luis Bunuel told us

Our imagination, and our dreams, are forever invading

our memories; and since we are all apt to believe in the reality of our fantasies, we end up transforming our lies into truths. Of course fantasy and reality are equally personal, and equally felt, so their confusion is a matter of only relative importance.<sup>24</sup>

What does it mean to show oneself, to make oneself visible, to seek the offering up of oneself so as to be read as 'subject'? Montaigne's 'To the Reader' reveals an introduction to a number of key issues here, issues for which his text also provides explicit illustration. This occurs because that which Montaigne describes is more than (just) an introduction to the idea of the self-reflexivity of his and our time; it also speaks to us of the ego of the artist.<sup>25</sup> The signature of the artist, we might say, is not placed, as is usual in visual art practices, at the bottom right hand corner of the work, at the last point at which the eye, conditioned to the reading of a page from top to bottom and from left to right, will reach. The last 'word' in every sense. Neither is the author's name on the front cover, spine and title page of the work, eminently visible yet always a part of the frame rather than the work. With Montaigne's 'I am myself the subject of my book' the signature, the author's name, is at once enunciator and enunciated. The subject of the artist takes for itself the position of the subject-proper, both a part of the frame and also that which is being framed.

As Oscar Wilde informed us, life imitates art to a much greater degree than art imitates life.<sup>26</sup> Artists invent 'types', which are then assimilated into human behavioural patterns. Writing at the close of the nineteenth century, Wilde's epigrammatical style may have lost much of its flavour, and yet his comments on the relationship between truth and art remain pertinent to late twentieth century



performance. When Wilde chastised the artists of his day for presenting for public consumption their “tedious *document humaine(s)*”<sup>27</sup> he sent a timely warning to all of those (all of us) who attempt to offer up the barely repackaged self as subject. “The justification for a character”, Wilde tells us “is not that other persons are what they are, but that the author is what he is.”<sup>28</sup> In this sense, *At Last Sight* might reasonably be regarded as my own attempt to articulate who and what it is that I am. And yet, if a part of who I am is a liar, then the integrity of anything I produce can never be taken at face value. If, as a liar, I say that the work is truthful my claims cannot be believed; by the same token, any claim I may make that certain sections of the work are false is suspect.

It is no Wildean wordplay to state that art is as concerned with the creation of aestheticised lies as it is with the articulation of truth. If it is ‘myself that I paint’, then the subject of ‘myself’ is defined by the I of the artist; what is shown, revealed to the spectator, is always already mediated, selected and made false by the maker’s judgement (as are the words written here). In this way, it is not the subject of ‘myself’ that is being offered to the spectator, so much as the artist’s, *this* artist’s, sense of self.

**1-3-98**

In his book, *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman cites an example of this phenomenon with reference to the former American president Ronald Reagan

There was a downside to Reagan’s emotional

intelligence capabilities, as he displayed a certain lack of self-awareness, if not outright self-deception. At times he seems not to have known the difference between films he had seen or stories he had heard and the actual facts. Reagan once brought tears to the eyes of Yitzhak Shamir, then prime minister of Israel, with a story about his days with the U.S. Signal Corps recording the atrocities of the German death camps at the end of World War II. The problem: Reagan spent the entire war in Hollywood recruiting for the army's film units. He had, however, seen footage from the liberated camps and, apparently, convinced himself he's been there.<sup>29</sup>

Whether Reagan's comments were delusion or a conscious attempt to delude can never now be known. All that we can say is that fantasy and reality were blurred to the extent that an identity was made subject to a process of fictionalisation. Reagan's assertions were such that the 'lie' could not survive for long without being discovered. For those of us whose assertions are smaller and whose lives are lived beyond the scrutiny of biographers, the 'truth' of any given claim is harder to determine. Reagan aside, and notwithstanding John Cage's advice that the self should only ever rarely be the subject of art,<sup>30</sup> we can recognise self-portraiture as a form with strong historical precedents. Further, we can see - certainly no less in performance terms than in visual art - that it is generally reliant on four elements for its existence.

These elements are the artist as subject (as model, as theme); the performance event that accommodates or provides a platform for the expression; the image of the self, the 'myself', within the artist's own notion of that self; and, finally, the spectator's reading of the work. A fifth element exists in *At Last Sight* inasmuch as the 'self' of the subject is presented *via* the selves of the performers. *My Self*



mediated through *Their Selves*. The written text alone can stand outside this equation, and the importance of the ways in which this text, or aspects of it, are to be presented and made public is becoming increasingly apparent.<sup>31</sup>

The mediation of my own work through the contribution of others creates issues of creative and intellectual ownership. With issues of performance *per se* collaboration is contained within the very fabric of its being: in all but the rarest of cases performance *is* an intrinsically collaborative act. As part of an investigation of practice as research, however, the relationship takes on a different slant. The question of who 'owns' the work moves beyond its usual realm of philosophical enquiry into the no less pertinent field of accreditation. This is an issue inasmuch as it creates something of a paradox, at least potentially. For that which stands as common practice in both direction and writing for performance is a type of 'giving away' of the work. To the creation of a climate wherein the suggestions contained within the text, alongside any directorial preconceptions, are not generally allowed to blind the director to contributions from participants, be they performers, designers or technicians. In those instances where work is being made with students, as part of a wider programme of study, the compulsion to provide space for the creative and intellectual engagement of those student-participants is, if not necessarily stronger than in any other sphere, then certainly more overt.<sup>32</sup> This is evidenced not least in increasingly prescriptive learning outcomes, which, as well as threatening to imbue all creative work with banal and unworkable notions of 'equivalence', seek to dictate the terms of closure to that which has not yet been made.<sup>33</sup>

4-3-98



Not all of these academically imposed 'requirements' have a negative aspect. Creative involvement, in the sense of decision-making, for instance, alongside a 'marked degree of personal engagement with the subject matter and superb integration of the student's own creative thinking and imagination' and an 'originality of insight and perception'<sup>34</sup> are features, if not always prerequisites of First Class work in the production modules at University College Chester. Just as they are at a number of other institutions. And it is hard to envisage a situation wherein any member of staff directing a performance project would not find these qualities desirable in any and all members of the company. Certainly, in terms of *At Last Sight*, I am hoping to gather around me a group of creatively fertile and intellectually astute individuals who are in no way content to be moved through the period of rehearsal like so many sheep.<sup>35</sup> But how much of the process of making the work can be 'given away' to the *participants* without the work itself ceasing to stand as my own? The fact that there are no satisfactory answers to this does not mean that the question itself should not be addressed. Notwithstanding the fact that the issue is more central to the submission of the work as part of the thesis than it is to the creation of work for public presentation.

The issue of creating an example of practice as research, in which the participating students are also being assessed, is complicated. There are a variety of reasons as to why this is the case. Many of these reasons are subject to ongoing debate between the Standing Conference of University Drama Departments (SCUDD) and those British Government bodies which, act in response to the submissions received from respective departments as part of their particular Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).<sup>36</sup> These responses determine the level of funding



afforded as an increasingly necessary top-up to the departmental subsidy received from students' tuition fees. The need for this additional income means that departments are becoming more inclined to include in their programmes of study a preponderance of modules which are designed to satisfy these exercises in staff-research evaluation rather than the more traditional requirement of learning outcomes which relate to the student. At University College Chester, this shift in emphasis has yet to occur. A consequence of this is that whilst *At Last Sight* has its genesis as a research project, and that it seeks the continuance of that status, the project must also, and firstly, be seen to satisfy the learning outcomes for the students involved. This means that an exploratory project is being entered into which will have to satisfy certain outcomes ... a state that is almost entirely antithetical to progressive performance practice.

Whatever this means it must not mean that the piece becomes all things to all people, a safety net through which nothing, be it a learning outcome, an advance in theoretical understanding or some development in new performance can ever be allowed to slip. The fact that different people involved with the work will have different agendas for that involvement will not be allowed to hinder the project's intent. The students involved will thus be given something of the task of research assistants inasmuch as they will, in their role as performers, form a considerable element of the material of that which is to be presented. They add to the creation of a research framework within which their own selves are being researched. The rigours of undergraduate assessment, alongside the increasingly prescriptive rather than provocative nature of work in the university sector, could be seen to augur against open-ended practical and experimental practical work.<sup>37</sup> But as long as the



participants are afforded a comparable opportunity to achieve the learning outcomes that have been written into the modular programme there should be no insurmountable difficulties posed.

If the processes involved in *At Last Sight* are being offered here as a case-study of the making of work for performance then the work itself must not be made in a climate of fear connected to a crossing over of the line between *my* work and *theirs*. The work is being made in the here and now and it is being made to satisfy various and not always overtly compatible criteria. It is thus both *mine* and *theirs*. It is at one and the same time a student-project for *these* students and a student-project for *this* student. It is what it is, and it cannot, with any sense of legitimacy, disguise itself as anything else. If one paradox of the performance is that it will be seeking to deal with the (unattainable?) idea of truth through the artifice of theatrical presentation, then another is that it is at once both mine and not mine. The intention, therefore, must be to articulate with as much integrity and accuracy as is possible those points - in so much as they are in any way recognisable - when new directions and possibilities are put forward by members of the group. In this way, the group members become collaborators in the widest sense, rather than mere communicators of my words and thoughts. The ways in which this happens - and we know already that happen it surely will - will form one line that will run through Chapter Two. Up until that point, I am afforded the luxury of an unhindered megalomania ... a megalomania which (if the truth be told) is as much about a putting off of the moment of collaborative enquiry as it is a preparation for it.



There is a link in this work with the nature of performance itself, inasmuch as the work is concerned with a making visible, with a showing, of that very basis on which the notion of *mimesis* stands. With the image of a man which is being produced and articulated (enunciated) by the very means of the artefact of reflexivity ... of the mirror image. All performances are self-portraits to a large extent: the selves of the director, designer, writer, performer *et al*. Of these, it is the performer, usually but not always, who is the most highly visible and yet the least powerful. The performer performs other people's stories and the name, above the title or at the bottom right hand corner of the canvas, is rarely the name of the artist (of the subject) who is seen. *At Last Sight* is not a subversion of that 'rule' so much as it is an exploration as to how far and to what extent the performer can present no fictional sense of self and yet still act as a signifier for another self. The 'myself' of the 'I' of the unseen other.

There is an arrogance at work here. It is a type of arrogance, furthermore, that locates itself at the centre rather than the fringes of the work. It is the arrogance of a presence, which, notwithstanding an act of representation and realisation through others, sees itself as able to permeate each and every aspect of the work. An arrogance which seeks the public identification of the 'self' as a subject worthy of spectators' and performers' time and efforts. There is, however, a fear that exists as part of the arrogance: it is the fear of an absence of something essential to the man of the artist which can only be dealt with, put right (?) through the presence of performance. *At Last Sight* is thus as much about that absence as this presence, as much about the painfulness of experience as the pleasures of aestheticisation; as much about loathing as much as serving the self. If the self is not known. And if



what little is guessed at is not particularly liked by that same self, then the self-portraiture or autobiography of certain types of art may well stand as a flawed but otherwise respectable attempt at locating, through the instability of performance, some sense of redemption through enunciation. Of catharsis.

The material being dealt with here is about composing a life, and about composing a text for performance: that much, at least, is known. The challenge, is how, working with the self as subject, that subject can at once contain much of the at all times subjective and fragmentary complexities of existence and also maintain the legitimacy of a text which communicates something relatively coherent to the spectator. Generally speaking, autobiography exists in order to provide an insight into the lives of important, influential and historically significant individuals ... in those instances, one's own pre-knowledge of the subject creates a veneer, or an illusion, of objectivity. With the subject of *At Last Sight* being this writer's unknown self - an 'ordinary life' - then no such objectivity can be argued for. Theatre and performance provide platforms from which to speak in voices which are authentic at the same time as they will always be heard as 'art' by dint of their qualities of presentation in front of an audience. The Twentieth Century has seen performance grow into a form for the presentation of self as much as it the representation of other.<sup>38</sup> In this, a distinction, or schism, has developed between theatre and performance. With the illusory nature of theatre acting standing apart from the more overtly personal tone of performance. This has happened to the degree that we can now say that when a spectator attends a performance art event, s/he does so with a fair assumption that that which will be presented will bear some



considerable relation to the concerns of those who are doing the performing. The performer here is in the role of the performer, rather than in any character.

Writing from a gender-specific perspective, Catherine Elwes has described performance as “the real life presence of the artist (who) takes no role but her own. She is author, subject, activator, director and designer. When a woman speaks within the performance tradition, she’s understood to be conveying her own perceptions, her own fantasies, her own analyses.”<sup>39</sup> By putting her own or his own body and experience forward within a live (arts) space, the artist becomes both object and subject within the frame of the work, and, as a consequence, this situation allows the artist to interrogate and articulate that relationship. The reference to the ‘real life’ persona of the artist is the stuff of performance art. The context of performance provides the performing artist with the opportunity for a live address which is markedly dissimilar to the Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt* that comes with the breaking through of the imaginary fourth wall between spectator and spectacle. Within performance art, it is far more likely that the notion of there being any fourth wall to subvert would be regarded with a great deal of cynicism and a healthy mistrust. We can say, therefore, that the performing of oneself is a feature of performance, even something central to it, whereas the submergence of self into character is a defining trait of acting.<sup>40</sup>

**5-3-98**

If the mode of performance deals with the unmasking of self, of the act or event of performance as self-revelation, then where does this leave *At Last Sight*? It is interesting to note that we refer to the one who is present in front of the spectators as the ‘performance artist’, suggesting an identification between the watcher and



the watched which, at least on the part of the watcher, seeks out an 'honest' communication. This may mean that the performers in *At Last Sight* will be functioning as actors in a performance of self, rather than performers who are offering their own fantasies and analyses for perusal. This is a serious distinction, because the ways in which the spectators view the work will have a considerable bearing on that which they actually see. The role of the artist as performer is one which allows for the assuming of a series of transitory identities at the same time as the artist's own live presence is being signalled. No less complex, though in rather different ways, is the role of the performer as 'self' and representer of an unseen, writerly and directorial (and, let us not forget, *teacherly*) 'other'. When the performer speaks of 'I', within the context of *At Last Sight*, which 'I' is being referred to? To which artist does the 'I' refer?

7-3-98

Spalding Gray's 'I' is clearly his own,<sup>41</sup> just as the actorly Uncle Vanya's 'I' is Chekhov's. The device of 'I' is generally held to be an attempt at the expression of self, a self that is particular and irreducible, and yet the 'I' is available to any individual spectator - just as it is to each and every performer. It can therefore be regarded as the least particular of all words.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, the 'I' of *At Last Sight* has an unsettled nature, and this is made manifest in a writing of the text which is demanding of multiple readings. The 'self' in *At Last Sight* functions as a site wherein the meaning of identity is contested rather than confirmed. Where, through the self-revelatory act of performance, the artist (at this stage still and only the writer) is able to fix and unfix the relationship between representation and presentation and between the writerly and the performative selves.



In seeking to bring the real self, or selves - the Duchampian idealisation of the everyday - into the domain of art, and an attendant breaking down of the boundaries between art and artist, performance has been brought even closer to the realisation that whilst life and art may at times be one and the same thing, they are also always different. The difference is in context rather than content, but the two are the same inasmuch as *life*, like *art*, is always mediated, and the space occupied by the everyday is every bit as much a product of construction as that for performance. According to Kwame Anthony Appiah

Every human identity is constructed, historical; every one has its share of false presuppositions ... invented histories, invented biologies, invented cultural affinities come with every identity; each is a kind of role that has to be scripted, structured by conventions of narrative to which the world never quite conforms.”<sup>43</sup>

The textual strategy of *At Last Sight* is not to assume a false, collective identity, preferring instead to speak of slippage and fragmentation. To this end, no lines of text are attributed to specific speakers, either by gender or any other distinction. The text is written out as a series of sections, which, at this stage, may be addressed by one or any number of voices. The fact that these extracts of text, neither monologue nor dialogue, cross constantly between fiction and truth, lies and artifice, will, ultimately, be regarded in significant ways as much by who speaks the words and in what ways as by any key qualities in the text's construction.

If all of the voices contained within the text are my own, either as a result of experience or invention, then the question of whose mouth utters the words would seem to be a matter of singular unimportance. In fact, because any descriptions in



the text, such as they exist at all and being of either person or place, are emphatically **not** descriptions of the potential performers and/or the theatre spaces to be played in, then the gender of the speaker is, by definition, largely inconsequential. And yet this is to deny almost all of our experiences of performance, experiences which tell us that what we see is at least as important as the words which are heard. Linguistic distinctions certainly exist between television viewers, with a concentration on the view, and theatre audiences, with their concentration on the audible, and these are no doubt rooted in good sense, but such distinctions have been eroded by a collapsing of the once-vital differences between the forms.<sup>44</sup> Consequently, the visual elements of *At Last Sight* will inform the individual spectator's responses to the overall work in ways, which are considerable. The semiotics of performance bring with them a complexity which is every bit as demanding of the visual attentiveness of a spectator as it is of that spectator's aural sensibilities, and the ways in which work is presented go beyond issues of form, becoming essential elements of the content itself. The different performers attracted to the project will each bring with them different qualities and characteristics. These will, hopefully, be deployed to a positive effect. Prior to meeting with the performing group, there is considerable effort involved in the writing of words which are not so much neutral as loaded with potential for a variety of voices.

If my expectations of the performers have to remain at times frustratingly open, am I able to determine what it is that is expected of the spectator? What is it that I 'want' from the spectators? For I am surely making the work with an intention that it will achieve certain things. *At Last Sight* is not being offered up as a copy of the



world, either my own small occupied space or the spectators' obviously wider one, and, accordingly, I would not wish to see a spectator impressed overmuch by any aspects of mimetic realism which might appear in the work.

Philostratus warned viewers not to fall into this trap, arguing that to do so is to

praise an insignificant feature ... one that has solely to do with imitation; but we should not be praising its intelligence or the sense of decorum it shows, though these, I believe, are the most important elements of art."<sup>45</sup>

Philostratus is talking here of visual art, but the comparison with performance holds true. By the same token, and despite the feel of this chapter, which is offering an articulation of the reasons 'leading to' *At Last Sight* rather than taking the text apart line-by-line and providing an analysis as to where the words 'came from', theory may prove to be an anathema. Not to the thesis itself, which demands a theoretical approach as its natural right, but the performance, which I have no wish to develop into the thin theatricalisation of theory. Theory provides us with an invaluable means of reading the activities of ourselves and others, of reflecting and communicating much of that which is done, rather than merely accepting things as 'happening'. At the same time, we need to recognise the fact that theory will sometimes amount to no more than a self-satisfying endeavour to justify the narrowness of the world in which much of those same activities take place. At its worst, the seeming clarity of sight made possible through theoretically sustainable argument might actually reduce the potency of activity to little more than the legitimisation of tired techniques under the veneer of academic respectability and a dubious advancement of knowledge.



These sentiments are not intended to suggest that an interest in theory will always work against activity. Or that talking eloquently and incisively about art in some way augurs against the making of it. The words are offered as a recognition that theory *is* capable of determining activity in advance. That it can allow and even encourage the continuance of certain forms of practice simply by dint of the fact that those practices are grounded in a shared and critically established methodology. Used in this way, theory permits activities, which deny the specificity of particular investigations; it creates, in fact, the absurdity of experimentation as genre, of new work which is made to conform to the shape of the old. The line between a theory which drives work forwards and a theory which holds work back is a fine one, and difficult to trace. What occurs in the making of work for performance is that it is the specificity of *this* encounter, at *this* time and determined by *these* variants which determines the theoretical approach to be taken. That the work, and the attendant theorising, may lead those involved in its study beyond the usual Catch-22 of its enclosure, taking them towards a new topography of terms, is germane to the ways in which new work is made. As such, *At Last Sight* is not being deliberately constructed as a paradigm of a particular *type* of work. Considerable efforts are being taken to ensure that the writing of *these* words is not allowed to pre-empt the writing of *those* words of text, in much the same way that directorial and performative decisions, articulated in Chapter Two, will be the subject of analysis rather than that which takes analysis as its subject.

11-3-98

At the outset of this chapter, mention was made of my absence from my children as an element leading to the construction of *At Last Sight*; both in terms of the written



text and the overall feel of the performance. This creates a difficulty, because the prospect of making a piece of work which is *about* children, which takes the relationship of a father and his children as its *theme*, is something I would be at great pains to avoid. The text, as it stands, refers directly to children only very briefly, in a line which speaks of 'seeing my children by appointment', but this line is 'buried' in amongst a number of diverse references, making the paternal attitude of the specific five words a subject of diminished significance. What does remain is a tone of loss, of remorse and regret, which, dislocated as it is from its actual source, *reads* as an elegy to a lost love. Which it is ... although the 'love' articulated in the text is manifest in the form of a partner rather than a child. Partly, this is to do with a resistance to the peculiar type of sentimentality associated with the idea of children in art. Partly it is to do with a breadth of appeal, for, played as it will be to a predominantly youthful audience,<sup>46</sup> the issues of parenthood which inform the work might be best served by a reining in. Death is more than hinted at in the text, with notions of drowning featuring at regular intervals. In this way, death stands as a metaphor for absence in the same way that the constructed image of a 'loved woman' is a metaphor for my children. Hypocrisy creeps in here, for it is undeniably the case that the decision to live apart from my children was largely my own. Consequently, an observer of this act of leaving might well recognise the treatment of that same incident in performance as an inappropriately public crying over long-spilt milk.

The writing of *At Last Sight* is poetic, or poeticised, at least to the degree that none of the sentences reads like 'natural' dialogue. Although there are some quite brief sections of the text which are designed to be indicative of two people engaged



in conversation, these ‘conversations’ do not attempt to mirror those patterns of speech encountered in that which is regarded as ‘real life’. There are a number of distinctions between poetry and prose, the chief, perhaps, being the idea that prose represents reality, whilst poetry, ultimately, refers only to itself.<sup>47</sup> This distinction results in the act of prose being illustrative of an effort to translate an intention into an appropriate *result*, whereas poetry is more of a gratuitous discipline, one that is neither consequential nor motivated. As such, and sometimes perversely, poetry is both self-contained and open to a multitude of interpretations. *Feelings* are thus suited to poetic treatment in much the same way that *facts* are themselves the very stuff of prose.<sup>48</sup> Lacking the utilitarian or documentary drive of prose, a poetic approach seems appropriate for the material of *At Last Sight*. If it is the case that the act of specific remembrance itself is fundamentally inarticulate, in that any of the words of prose we might possess and use are incapable of communicating much more than the factual details of the phenomenon. Then the text of *At Last Sight*, written in the way that it is, is intended to function as an inculcation of a spectator’s personal emotional experiences. It does so through the elegising of my own partly disguised responses to a difficult (and difficult to deal with) time.

It may be true to say that postmodernism’s predilection towards self-reflexivity has resulted in a situation wherein autobiographical material has become commonplace, where that which is, on the one hand, specific, is also representative of a rapidly tiring theme. In contemporary visual art we have seen enlarged endoscopic photographs of Mona Hatoum’s internal organs projected onto gallery walls. We have walked around and into Tracey Emin’s tent-installation, made art by the inscription on the canvas of the names of each of her overnight bedfellows.



We have looked at Piero Manzoni's canned faeces, *Merda d'artista*, '100% Pure Artist's Shit' in its absolutely literal sense. We have recognised Marc Quinn's heat-reduced *Shit Head* and deep-frozen *Blood Head*. We have gazed at Cindy Sherman's relentlessly imaged face, whether in its guise of 1940s film-still, pathologist's photograph or Renaissance painting. In performance we have seen Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scrolls* produced from her vagina; Karen Finley's down-stage-pointing, yam-juiced anus and Annie Sprinkle's 'Public Cervix Announcement', a torch-lit invitation for her audience to peer inside her.<sup>49</sup> At perhaps its most extreme, we see the performance artist Stelarc suspended by hooks through his non-anaesthetised body as he hovers over New York streets. As we have seen Orlan subjecting herself to a series of surgical re-configurations - to plastic surgery - as art-event. The residuum which is left over from Orlan's operations have become objects of art in themselves, with Madonna, amongst others, owning a section of flesh which was removed by scalpel from Orlan's thigh.<sup>50</sup> Orlan is anaesthetised, but only locally, in order that she can speak to her spectators for the duration of the procedure. It is possible to make out a considerable list of self-reflexive practitioners, but to do so would serve only to labour an already-realised point. To the extent that the *self* has become the *subject*, so the subject of self has become an accepted and acceptable theme of contemporary art and performance.

Along the growing continuum of body and performance artists, of those who project rather than use their own life histories, psychologies and obsessions, my own approach to making work might seem quite tame. It is unlikely, for example, that *At Last Sight* will involve any elements of physical risk on the part of either the



performers or spectators. The notion of taking risks in performance may provide for those artists, and perhaps also for some spectators, some form of liberation, a making-sense of the difficulties of existence. The less ostensibly emblematic risk-taking involved in the construction of the text for *At Last Sight* is in its encounter (in my encounter) with that which is most feared. With the personal perceptions and daily pain of past actions. The text 'for' is also the text 'of' *At Last Sight*, but the use of the word 'of' carries with it the suggestion that the text *is* the work. The work of the text and the work of the whole process is thus redemptive - it already is, in part - inasmuch as it is built upon a desire to come to greater terms with the ramifications of my own behaviour. That, within the text, a woman is made to stand as a metaphor for my children is informed by the fact that for love of a woman I no longer live with my children, whom I also love, and equally. Love is therefore functioning as both liberation and loss, as a licence to leave and a longing to stay, as a form of salvation and a falling into selfishness. *Self* is the spine of the work because my own self-interests have taken something away from the two people in this world who were born of myself. If this appears as a type of self-flagellation then that is understandable, unavoidable even, but if that is a large part of the motivation behind the work it is only a very small part of the work itself. It is certainly not my intention that the experience of seeing the work will result in a maudlin empathising with the background to the work. Indeed, that stimulus will not be made known in any form of programme or performance-accompanying literature.

The art is being made with a multiple purpose. There is no one 'authorial intention', because that which the author intends is precisely that which is intended



to remain hidden from view. The work is aiming for a form of redemption, and yet that which is being redeemed is not about to be made manifest to the spectators. What potential for *truth* there is in the work is thus made *false* by its very act of presentation. The fact that the presentational aspects of *At Last Sight* function through metaphor does not add to the falsity. The work is always already false in that there are no good reasons to support the idea that redemption achieves a greater value by dint of its being theatricalised and made public. We can say that the concealed nature of the rationale behind the project serves a purpose in that it prevents any notions of martyrdom from fuelling the performance. But this only serves to make the endeavour even further removed from any claim it might make to be regarded in some way as an 'honest' piece of work. The desire to tell in this way invalidates much of that which is told ... subsequently, we can no more trust the teller than the tale.

**14-3-98**

"No art could ever be truth", Richard Foreman informs us: "the truth of art is in the audience's, the individual's awakened perceptions. It is not in the work of art."<sup>51</sup> If this is so, and I believe that it is, I have to question my own reasons for making work in the way that I am. Just as naturalism is theatre's truest absurdity, so honesty is the greatest myth of performance. Does this mean that I am making a crafted lie (the stuff of theatre) at the same time as I am basking in the self-gratifying illusion of truth (the fiercely guarded territory of performance art)? Certainly I am. Of that I have no doubt. I want to make work that succeeds as theatre and performance; to make art that works within and without artifice. This reveals a desire on my part to synthesise live art and lived experience. To synthesise without also arriving at an unknowing state of confusion. We know

enough to know that the attempt to *be* oneself within a performance frame will always fail and become a (re)presentation of self, inasmuch as the frame of performance precludes authentic presentation ... as Mrozek states in his article *Reality versus Theatre*, “ trying to work out how to look genuine will never achieve life’s authentic spontaneity.”<sup>52</sup>

The event of *At Last Sight* will be purposively mediated by the spectators, who will translate the experience *via* the individual processes of perception which they apply to the work. In effect, they will act as mediators between themselves and the stimulus, in much the same way that the participant members of the group will mediate between my intentions for the project and their own.

**15-3-98**

It might well be the case that to increase the stages of removal from whatever *realness* existed at the outset of the piece is to also increase the spectator’s experience of a type of isolation. That the greater the mediation, the less potent is the sense of connection between the watcher and the watched. Exe Christoffersen, like Wilde, warns us against the pursuance of the real, telling us that

authentic and original behaviour is an illusion. When the thought is first thought it is no longer something unspoiled, a change has taken place: a cultural change.”<sup>53</sup>

Irrespective of location, frame or context it is the spectator who culturally and subjectively creates a meaning and a ‘place’ for the work. The spectator may be passive in an auditorium seat but is nevertheless active in a role of formulating a response to that which is seen.

The see-er does not appropriate the world she sees, but in looking opens herself to it, lives in it from the inside,



and becomes immersed in it.”<sup>54</sup>

If we combine this with Michael Kirby’s well-documented ‘Symbolised Matrix of Acting’<sup>55</sup> (a system which will clearly inform the performance-work to be undertaken) then the intention of *At Last Sight* can be seen as an affording to the spectator of a central point of “identification of self-hood”.<sup>56</sup> As Marvin Carlson puts it, “The audience is invited and expected to operate as a co-creator of whatever meanings and experience the event generates.”<sup>57</sup>

It is to be hoped that the heavily end-noted nature of these concluding paragraphs does not result in a structure which decelerates the thrust of this thesis, even as it inevitably slows this chapter to a halt. The references are intended as a preparation for the impetus of Chapter Two. A chapter which will attempt, within the context of subjecting a creative and collaborative rehearsal process to analytical documentation, to pick its way through a postmodern preoccupation, which is also my own. To grapple with the uneasy and shifting relationship between the signifier and that which is signified; to map a route which takes the reader through the making process and on to performance.

From the ‘My Self’ of this chapter’s introduction, the drift has taken us towards the Baudrillardian concept of reality as that which is not only capable of being produced, but “which is always already reproduced.”<sup>58</sup> Towards Kantor’s declaration that “in art truth is elsewhere.”<sup>59</sup> It seems a relevant point of closure to this section. One which is also an introduction, and an invitation, to Chapter Two.



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<sup>1</sup> Introduction to the Pierre Villey edition of *Essays*, Montaigne. Michel de Montaigne, Presse Universitaires de France, 1580.

Montaigne wrote an autobiography, published in 1580, which contained within it a justification for devoting a book to the 'trivial topic' of himself. Whilst admitting that his topic was relatively unimportant he argued that this was offset by the fact that he knew his subject so much better than any other author could hope to know his. Montaigne's implication was that knowledge of one's self was the most complete and perfect form of understanding.

<sup>2</sup> I have visited the theatre festival in Liege on five previous occasions and know many of the personnel involved. I also know members of some of the troupes scheduled to perform this year. Because the festival functions as a social gathering as well as a forum for performance, and because some of the festival-goers are friends of long-standing, details about my past are known. Having taught at Chester since 1990, many of my colleagues are aware of my divorced and remarried status, as indeed are a number of students.

<sup>3</sup> I have two children, Danielle, born in 1985 and Jake, born in 1990. I was married in 1983 and divorced in 1993. I remarried in 1994.

<sup>4</sup> By this I mean the following:

That the public nature of performance amounts to a type of secret-telling to a room of strangers ... which seems antithetical to the subject matter.

That channelling (something of) my own experiences through other performers and thence to spectators might amount to a form of dilution.

That the activity of crafting something performative out of truth will take the presented form away from its origins and on towards something no less 'fake' than a well-rehearsed lie.

That, as Philip Auslander points out when he refers to Andy Kaufman in *Presence and Resistance* (1994) 'any "Andy Kaufman" that appears on television cannot be real simply by virtue of having been constructed by the medium.' (p.151). In the same way, the fact that *At Last Sight* is being constructed for performance augurs against the sense of 'real' I am pursuing.

That performance might not be the most appropriate form to work through. The fact that performance is my 'area' does not mean that the concerns of *At Last Sight* might not be more effectively worked through in another medium. I am not sure, for example, how much will be constructively added to the written text of *At Last Sight* by its being performed. Perhaps the work would be 'better' were it to be 'only' a written text, or a sculpting, or an abstract design. A part of this is not about a lack of confidence in my own abilities to make work of a certain quality so much as it signifies a lack of faith in performance itself.

<sup>5</sup> See Kantor, T 'The Theatre of Death (1975)' *The Drama Review* 30.3, 1986.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed examination of a number of devising processes see Oddey, A *Devising Theatre*. Routledge, London & New York, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> See *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. Waugh, P. Routledge, London, 1984.

<sup>8</sup> Freud, S. *Art and Literature*. Penguin, London, 1985. pp. 66-68.

<sup>9</sup> For some of the occasions when this has not been the case see Bentley, E (ed.) *The Theory of the Modern Stage*. Penguin, Middlesex & New York, 1982

<sup>10</sup> This is not to suggest that all 'progressive performance practices' follow similar routes towards the interrogation a particular agenda, so much as it is a recognition that ideas of performative 'truth' are being increasingly made subject to question.

<sup>11</sup> See Onega, S and Landa *Narratology*. Longman, London & New York, 1996. Particularly Part Three, No. 9 'Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers (F. K. Stanzel). pp 161-171

<sup>12</sup> By 'my own', I mean that my organisational and selecting participation in the *At Last Sight* project is likely to make my own sense of where the work should go the most dominant factor in the group. This is not to deny participation on the part of group members. I am expecting the project to draw heavily on the creative input of its personnel. However, the group will be made up of students, and the performance module this project will be a part of carries with it an insistence on staff-direction rather than devising in a non-hierarchical spirit.

<sup>13</sup> See Kaye, N (1994) Particularly the chapter 'Theatricality and the Corruption of the Modernist Work'. Pp. 24-45



- <sup>14</sup> For an introduction to the work of Marcel Duchamp, see *Duchamp*. Mink, J. Taschen Press. Cologne, 1995
- <sup>15</sup> See *Modern Theatre: Realism and Naturalism to the Present*. Brockett, O.G. Allyn and Bacon, inc. Boston, 1982.
- <sup>16</sup> Again, it needs to be stressed that postmodernism is concerned with the unfixing of notions. As Hal Foster tells us, postmodernism “dissolves the line between creative and critical forms” (*Postmodern Culture*. Foster, H (ed.) Pluto Press, London, 1983. p.viii)
- <sup>17</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>18</sup> This is evidenced particularly in ‘student’ work, whether supervised/directed by members of staff or students. There is a sense in which these approaches conflate influence with imitation, resulting in experimentation and postmodernism reduced to genre. In drawing so parasitically on recent history the work appears almost immediately dated. Professional companies are not above this type of aesthetic plagiarism, and readers will have their own experiences of seeing work where the borrowed origins are disconcertingly apparent.
- <sup>19</sup> See MacDonald, C. ‘Assumed Identities: Feminism, Autobiography and Performance Art’ in *The Uses of Autobiography*. J. Swindells (ed.), Taylor & Francis, London, 1995. pp. 187- 195.
- <sup>20</sup> Derrida, J. ‘Psyche: Inventions of the Other’. *Reading de Man Reading*. Ed. L. Waters and W. Godzich. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. p. 194.
- <sup>21</sup> See Hutcheon, L *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, Methuen, New York, 1984. pp. 17-35
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>23</sup> For an in-depth analysis of mimetic referentiality see *Mimesis and Alterity*. Taussig, M. Routledge, London & New York, 1993.
- <sup>24</sup> Bunuel, L. in *The Surrealist Connection: An Approach to a Surrealist Aesthetic of Theatre*. David G. Zinder. UMI Research Press, Michigan, 1976. p. 40.
- <sup>25</sup> See *The Complete Essays*. Michel de Montaigne. (Screech, M.A. trans.) Penguin, London, 1993.
- <sup>26</sup> See *The Decay of Lying* (1891). Wilde, O. Penguin, London, 1995.
- <sup>27</sup> *ibid*. p. 9.
- <sup>28</sup> *ibid*. p. 16.
- <sup>29</sup> Goleman, D. *Working with Emotional Intelligence*. Bloomsbury, London, 1998. p. 355.
- <sup>30</sup> Cage, J. *Silence*. Marion Boyars, London, 1995. Cage states “I have come to be interested in anything but myself as art material.” p. 70.
- <sup>31</sup> It is evident by this point that, notwithstanding Barthes’ assertions that ‘text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture’ (Barthes, R ‘The Death of the Author’, *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, Hill and Wang, 1977, p.146) I am regarding the text of *At Last Sight* as ‘mine’.
- <sup>32</sup> See Maranca, B. ‘Theatre and the University at the end of the Twentieth Century’, *Performing Arts Journal* 17.2 and 17.3, May/September 1995, pp.55-71
- <sup>33</sup> ‘Learning Outcomes’ have become a stated feature of modular study. Academic module descriptors generally contain sections such as ‘Aims’, ‘Objectives’, ‘Methods of Teaching and Learning’ and ‘Methods of Assessment’, alongside ‘Learning Outcomes’. At best, perhaps, learning outcomes provide students with a sense of their expected achievements. The negative aspect is that teaching and learning are steered towards prescription at the expense of provocation. For the creative study of creative subjects, this is particularly pronounced.
- <sup>34</sup> *University College Chester Department of Drama, Dance and Theatre Studies: Departmental Handbook*, 1997/98. Section 6. p. 13-24.
- <sup>35</sup> The students involved in *At Last Sight* will select the project. The directors or leaders of projects are expected to leave the students to reach their own conclusions as to which proposal to opt for, and canvassing by tutors is actively discouraged. Certainly, as far as *At Last Sight* is concerned, I will be approaching no students in advance.
- <sup>36</sup> For the relevant documentation regarding research assessment exercises visit the SCUDD web-site.
- <sup>37</sup> This is not to suggest that performance work in the university sector is entirely prescriptive ... far from it. Interesting and progressive work is taking place in many, if not all, departments. The



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difficulty lies in finding spaces for this work to exist, and to locate these spaces within a more rigidly defined approach to the study of performance than existed prior to modularisation.

<sup>38</sup> Writing specifically about Twentieth Century developments, Lea Vergine states that performance can be made of any aspect of one's own life: "The proofs of one's own existence, and the entire sphere of everything 'private' are used as repertory material. Anything and everything can be pressed into service: any action from any moment of any day, photographs of oneself, or x-rays, or medical test graphs, one's own voice, all of the possible relationships one can have with one's excrement or one's genitals, reconstructions of one's past or the theatrical presentation of one's dreams." *The Body as Language*. Vergine, L. Skira, Milan, 1974. p.15

<sup>39</sup> Elwes, C. 'Floating Femininity' in Catherine Elwes & Rose Garrard (Eds.) *About Time*, London, ICA, 1980. p. 42

<sup>40</sup> Auslander describes this as 'The blending of real and fabricated personae and situations that occur when performance personae assume the same functions as "real".' Auslander (1994) p.78

<sup>41</sup> Spalding Gray was a member of The Wooster Group for several years, developing ideas of his own self through the work, to the point where he now describes himself as a 'monologist', teller of the tales of his own life. The impetus for this work began with his mother's death, which became a central aspect of The Wooster Group's performance of *Rumstick Road* (1976). The confessional tone of the work upset many critics, and a thorough description of both the work and the subsequent response can be found in David Savran's *Breaking the Rules*, TCG, New York, 1988. pp. 74-101. The development of Gray's work, away from 'character-acting' is chronicled in his own book *Swimming to Cambodia*, Picador, London, 1986.

<sup>42</sup> See James, W. 'Sameness in the Self as Known' in *Psychology*. World Press, New York, 1948.

<sup>43</sup> Appiah, A. K. *In my Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. Oxford University Press, 1992. p. 96.

<sup>44</sup> See Goodwin, A. *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music, Television and Popular Culture*. Routledge, London and New York, 1993, for a discussion on the ways in which live performance and video are collapsing in on and simultaneously feeding off each other.

<sup>45</sup> From the Loeb edition of *Imagines*, ed. T.E. page, E. Capps and W.H.D. Rouse. William Heinemann, London and New York, 1931. p. 34.

<sup>46</sup> Despite a reasonable number of mature students, the age of most students at University College Chester is 18-21. Members of staff attend in-house productions, as do members of the public, but they do not do so in large numbers. The bulk of the Chester audience will certainly be 'young adults'. In Liege the students are older, as are members of other troupes, and this, alongside a wider mix of student and non-student spectators, will push the overall age of the audience up. Notwithstanding this, the spectators at both venues will be predominantly younger than one might expect to see in a different context.

<sup>47</sup> See 'The Name and Nature of Poetry', Houseman, A.E. in *The Creative Process*. Ghiselin, B. (ed.) New American Library, New York, 1952. pp.86-91

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*

<sup>49</sup> Work of this description is documented in Rebecca Schneider's *The Explicit Body in Performance*. Routledge, London and New York, 1997. Writing from a strongly feminist perspective, Schneider interrogates and contextualises culturally framed depictions of the explicit body in performance.

<sup>50</sup> A detailed analysis of Stelarc's performance activities can be found in Stelarc and Paffrath, James D. (Eds.) *Obsolete Body/Suspensions/Stelarc*, Davis, CA: JP Publications, 1984. Orlan's work is discussed in the final chapter of Zarrilli, Phillip B. (ed.) *From Acting to Performance*, Routledge, London and New York, 1997.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Foreman, cited Drain, R. *Twentieth Century Theatre*. Routledge, London and New York, 1995. p. 68.

<sup>52</sup> Mrozek, S. *Theatre versus Reality*, 'New Theatre Quarterly', Vol. VIII, No. 32, Nov. 1992. p. 301.

<sup>53</sup> Christoffersen, E. *The Actor's Way*. Routledge, London and New York, 1992. p. 158.

<sup>54</sup> Merlau-Ponty, cited Klaver, E. *Spectatorial Theory in the Age of Media Culture*, 'New Theatre Quarterly', Vol. XI, No. 44, Nov. 1995. p. 312.

<sup>55</sup> See Michael Kirby, cited Zarilli, P. *Acting (Re)Considered*. Routledge, London and New York, 1995. p. 44.



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<sup>56</sup> Klaver. p. 313.

<sup>57</sup> Carlson, M. *Performance*. Routledge, London and New York, 1996. p. 197.

<sup>58</sup> Baudrillard, J. *Simulations*. Semiotext(e), New York, 1983. p. 146.

<sup>59</sup> Tadeusz Kantor, cited in Drain, R. *Twentieth Century Theatre*. Routledge, London and New York, 1995. p. 67.



## Chapter Two

7-10-98

On October 6th, 1998, the group of students participating in the *At Last Sight* project was determined. The seven students, all Level 3 Drama Majors, are Sarah Skelton, Elizabeth Hague, Glenn Robertson, Christopher Roberts, Sarah Robertson, Anna Garnett and Andrew Proudfoot. The students selected the project from a choice of five, based, initially, upon a notice pinned up in the Drama Department corridor (Appendix 2). The students have all worked with me on earlier modules, and five of them, all except Sarah Robertson and Anna Garnett, were cast in a production of Jim Cartwright's *Road*, which I directed at University College Chester in 1996. Glenn Robertson was also cast in a version of Jez Butterworth's *Mojo*, which I directed in 1998. Each of the students, therefore, has what might be regarded as a reasonably close understanding of my own working methods and interests.

I have not questioned the students as to the reasons behind their choice of production. Partly, this is because I am aware of the vagaries of student decision-making, which may have as much to do with the choices made by close friends as by the challenges posed by specific projects. Primarily, however, it is because I have no desire to put myself in the position of appearing to solicit some sort of endorsement at the expense of colleagues.

As a reading of the description offered of *At Last Sight* will reveal, very little information was offered, although, as a reading-through of the proposals submitted



by colleagues (contained in Appendix 2) will indicate this was no less than the norm. The student cohort, some twenty-four students, gathered in the Drama Studio, where staff elaborated on the written information.<sup>1</sup> My own 'elaboration' added little to the written statement, other than to stress the fact that the presentation in Liege would necessitate a more concentrated period of preparation and rehearsal and that, notwithstanding my 'hook' that the work would be "devised and exploratory in nature."<sup>2</sup> I did, in fact, have certain existing ideas as to the ways in which the piece might commence, if not quite develop.<sup>3</sup> My feeling is that students attend as carefully to the manner in which the project is articulated as to the content or *genre* of the project itself. It is certainly the case that the presentations from members of staff inevitably reveal more than they intend, and that our own often idiosyncratic methods of speaking about the projects to be entered into are highly, if perhaps incorrectly, illustrative of the ways in which we might work.

This suggests that I am claiming an ability to 'read' the significant elements of my own delivery, which I am not at all convinced to be the case. It is sufficient here to state no more than it is my belief that the students are drawn to people as much as to projects and that we are each, to a greater or lesser extent, aware of that. I am sure, for example, that my own body language and eye contact was 'designed', perhaps intuitively, to attract certain students and discourage certain others. I have no *knowledge* that this happened, but my *feeling* is that it did. With the students ranged in a crude semicircle around the staff, and with students seated on the floor and staff standing, at least in those moments when we spoke, I have no reason to doubt that our physical emission of signs was insidiously influential.



Following these oral presentations, the students were given the opportunity to speak informally with members of the department, asking a series of questions as to preferred group-size and the potential complications on timetables stemming from specific rehearsal commitments. None of the seven students who gravitated towards the project offered by myself asked any questions as to the 'intention' behind the piece, the processes we might undertake between now and March of next year and/or any aesthetic rationale I might be intending to work to. Interestingly enough, the experience which the students in question have of my own work, relating as it does to *Road* and *Mojo*, means that they have brought with them an assumption that I am primarily interested in directing published texts rather than devising work with no dramatic source-material. Or even, in the case of *At Last Sight*, with the development of a previously unperformed text. The impression that the students from this year group carry of my production-work is that I am more comfortably located as a disrupter of extant theatre tradition than I am as a creator of something new and unpublished.

*Road* was presented as a promenade-piece, with a distinction being made inasmuch as the bulk of the scenes were played out simultaneously in various rooms around a public auditorium in such a way that no member of the audience could possibly see the entire (*sic*) play. Some scenes were repeated many times, whilst some were played once only. All alcohol consumed in the production was genuine, with four characters drinking to considerable and rapid excess in the final section of the play. *Mojo* was played out with male and female casts on alternate nights, with numerous and not always sufficiently judicious alterations to the text. Both *Road*



and *Mojo* were 'popular' productions with the student-community, although neither one was particularly satisfying to myself in terms of directorial input.<sup>4</sup> The perception of these students then (and I am aware that this is a generalised projection on my part) is that my directorial *penchant* is for an irreverent form of deconstruction. I went to some pains to stress to the seven students wishing to work on *At Last Sight* that there would be few similarities between any projects directed by me which they had previously seen and this one. Although in the emphasising of this point I had to wonder whether I was seeking to convince myself more strongly than the group.

The group accompanied me to my office, where I offered what little explanation I had at that time as to how we might commence the work. I had copies of the text for *At Last Sight*, which I passed out to the group. I emphasised the fact that no sections of the text had been written for either a male or female voice, but that I hoped the group would somehow draw on certain elements of that which was written, discarding others. I went to some lengths to explain that the text was to be regarded as one potentially influential ingredient in the creation of *At Last Sight*, but that we were not to regard it as an imposition. That it suggested a place to start rather than investing the project with a premature form of textual closure. Sarah Robertson asked if I would read the text aloud. She pointed out that my voice was the only one the group was more or less guaranteed not to hear in production. The students would accordingly be able to respond to the text in a manner which was not suggestive of any potential gender or casting distinctions. The group supported this idea and I agreed.



I have read aloud the existing text for *At Last Sight* on several occasions, and was surprised, therefore, to 'hear' the words differently when they were spoken to or in front of, others within this situation. The effect was dissimilar to previous readings on my own, in order for me, the writer, to hear the words spoken. On reading the work 'publicly', two things became apparent. The first was that the text, written as an elegiac, mournful exercise in what might be regarded at best as a striving for some sort of catharsis, at worst as a wallowing in aestheticised misery, *sounded like an aggressive interrogation*. The second, equally alarming aspect was that those sections which were originally *intended* to be confessional in an overtly romantic sense were now coming across as the words of an obsessive, of someone (let me throw caution to the wind here and say a *character*). A character, furthermore, who seemed to be confessing to a killing.

Reading the text to the students felt like reading someone else's words, except that I was aware at all times that this was not the case. What I know is that I have had no inkling of this *interpretation* (another caution to another wind) prior to the forty-five minutes that it took to speak the text aloud.

On one level, this was and is pleasing. It suggests a way into the work that has been absent up until this time. It suggests something of mood, at the same time as it provides an in-built opportunity for pace. My own history of making work is that whenever I am at a loss for ideas I opt to slow the performers and the subsequent performance down, leading to moments of *longueur*, which I consistently struggle with.<sup>5</sup> The idea of an interrogative and aggressive feel to the piece creates a relatively new challenge to my own experiences, which is to the good. The



problem, at this stage, is that I am concerned that the shift in direction pushes me away from the thoughts contained in both the introduction and first chapter of this thesis.

Without mentioning these new thoughts to the group, although with the suspicion that the manner of my own reading of the text, as my ideas of it developed, betrayed at least something of my thoughts, I asked the students for their first impressions. All said they felt, without prompting from me, that *At Last Sight* was a 'question and answer' text: a text for multiple voices and that it possessed a strong narrative drive, which related to the confessions of a man and the disappearance, reappearance and possible death of a woman. One student, Glenn Robertson, felt that the 'male' voices were precisely that, that they were plural, creating a 'narrative' made up of several confessions. Reading the text now, as I interrupt the writing of this chapter, I cannot easily see how I could spend so many months without the slightest hint of these aspects, which now seem to permeate and drive the text, and also, inevitably, the production to come, quite so emphatically. I had become aware, in the days leading up to the establishment of a performance-group, that the text was 'dark'. That it might lend itself somehow to a certain *film noir* look and feel, but these thoughts did not serve as any real preparation for a directional, and directorial approach to emerge. I worry now that this may seem like the setting up of some false and deliberately fabricated dichotomy. That I might appear to the reader to be manufacturing an opportunity to say that whilst *then* I was thinking like a writer, *now* I am functioning as a director, with all of the intentional ramifications which that particular shift in role and responsibility carries with it. The only way I can answer those potential



misgivings is to state that these are doubts which I myself do not feel. For me, this is a case of re-visiting one's own work with a fresh perspective.

**8-10-98**

One point, which needed to be stressed early on with the students, was that the work itself was going to be approached in a manner that embraced notions of heuristic research methodologies. This involved a degree of explanation on my part, as no members of the group were familiar with either the notion of heuristics or even the term. I explained my understanding of the etymology of the word. Heuristics stems from *heuriskein*, a word which comes from the Greek and means 'to find'. It is more broadly associated with the idea of a search for information and knowledge which is as closely linked to internal and personal development as it is to the principles of fact-finding most commonly associated with research. I referred the students to a key text, 'Heuristic Research', in *Challenges of Humanistic Psychology*,<sup>6</sup> and explained that heuristics allows, and indeed demands, that the opinions, feelings, moods and intuitions of the researcher are present throughout the period of research. And that in addition to an increased understanding of the area being studied, the researcher will also chronicle the specific phenomena of increased self-knowledge and awareness.

The students were interested in these notions and seemed positive about the opportunity to legitimise their own feelings within a research programme. Chris Roberts described this as a way of "writing ourselves into the process". Heuristics can sometimes be regarded as 'soft' research, as a liberal inclination towards a reading of mood, rather than the offering up of hard, scientific data. I was pleased and impressed with the students' immediate grasp of heuristics as an addition to



conventional approaches and not as a substitute for 'hard' analysis. Research through practice such as is being undertaken here involves people. To approach the work as though that human material were to function as something inanimate would be to disregard the very thing that makes performance what it is. Live work is lived, and the lived experiences of the participating students need to inform the thesis. How could they not? To separate the two out and say that the students will influence the practice but not the accompanying theoretical writing is to miss the point. *At Last Sight* is a written text. In one capacity it will always remain so. More importantly, however, it is now a project. People are involved.

As was outlined in the introduction to this thesis, we can say that heuristic processes offer an embrace of notions of self-discovery. As such, these processes are aligned to the type of creative rehearsal which this project seeks to employ. The very act of discovery leads the discovering researcher to new points of knowledge and new directions to take, just as the irregularities of rehearsal, the all too familiar stop/start of thwarted ideas and precious days 'lost', leads the director into new areas of practice. As surely as the practical project which I am calling *At Last Sight* is being commenced with no real sense of how the finished (*sic*) work will appear to an audience, so the written thesis, these words appearing now on the screen as I write them and on the page as you read, provide mute evidence of a heuristically driven journey towards an unknown and unknowable point. There is an immersion process with heuristics, which necessitates an openness and receptivity to the fluctuating (and frustrating) rhythms of research and rehearsal. In many ways, heuristics does not merely share a number of common features with the putting together of a creative project; it *is* a creative project. This means that



heuristics functions as much more than a peg to hang the work on – as, in effect, a neat legitimising agent – it articulates a way of thinking, and a way of thinking *about* thinking, which has always formed the spine of the work.

Because heuristics is concerned primarily with the nature of knowing, whatever thoughts and attitudes exist in the mind of the researcher/maker, however temporary and disconnected they may appear to be, are imbued with the capacity to shift the process of investigation on into new fields of thought. Accordingly, research into the ways in which a practical performance project is being made is this at the same time as it is also other. The process provides space for the extension and development of a knowledge which is subject-specific at the same time as the self of the researcher is enhanced.

**12-10-98**

The thrust of this chapter is to be a report on practical creative and rehearsal work undertaken with the group of seven students. In this way, it is expected that a pattern will emerge, apparent in the documentation, which the quite different pressures of rehearsal will not always reveal. In some ways, therefore, I am predicting that a more clinical and critical observation of the processes of making this production will be arrived at through the greater distance provided by *writing* than *doing*. I believe this to be the case, not because in the mode of student-writer I am any less ‘involved’ in the project than when I am functioning as a staff-director, but because, by definition, a great number of directorial decisions are suggested without necessarily having formed an *a priori* understanding of the reasons behind the choices. The relationship between director and cast (notwithstanding the additional *relationship* in this case of the lecturer and the



student, of one of the assessors and all of the assessed) is a responsive one. Ideas move back and forth and a series of adjustments, compromises and re-negotiations are undertaken. It is difficult within the context of such intense collaboration to keep track of whatever justifications might lie behind words offered and direction given. The process of documentation does not automatically lead to clarity, but it does provide a period, albeit brief, of reflection.

My primary motivation in documenting the creative process as it pertains to *At Last Sight* is to create a certain type of structure. A structure wherein I am able to recognise more fully the routes by which practical performance work is arrived at and to make that recognition public in a coherent manner. This calls for an equal measure of reflective and communicative skills ... for without the former the thesis is devoid of purpose whereas an absence of the latter would deny the successful dissemination which the discipline demands. In the documentary and analytical process, I will face, as I have already, a series of recurring doubts as to my ability to make the work *work*, alongside a gnawing concern for issues of structure within the self-avowed liberality of my chosen approach. For example, if what I *feel* about the nature of heuristic research (and heuristic rehearsal) is that my own ongoing and *immediate* observations and intuitions are both authentic and *ipso facto* valid, then I am unable, in advance, to know much, if anything at all, of the territory through which the thesis and the performance project will move.

The way forward is to let go of structure. To recognise that the data, which this thesis will contain, resides already in me as much as it does in the nature of that which is being examined. To realise that the structure the thesis takes is the



structure that it has. The challenge is to chronicle its nature ... to extrapolate and articulate the salient elements of the process. This might appear to carry with it the implication of an editing process, of an after-the-event manipulation of material in a way which would then suggest a hidden structure (discernible to the informed reader) of a recognisably linear path through the process. This will not be the case here. Other than for the purposes of proof reading, the thesis will not be modified in any way *via* the knowledge afforded through hindsight.

In place of a pre-ordained structure, the heuristic approach undertaken here will evidence a direct and personal relationship between 'my self' the researcher and 'my work' the researched. This relationship ties in with the autobiographical thrust of the performative written material that is, at present, *At Last Sight*. It foregrounds the very ideas of self-directed search, immersion and experience which have already categorised both the thesis and the performance project thus far.

**14-10-98**

The 'new' feelings about the ways in which *At Last Sight* appear to be developing will be conveyed within and through the differing manners of documentation. It may be the case that theoretical perspectives leading to analysis are integrated cleanly into some sections of the documentation, whilst at other times the 'description' of activities might be written with little or no attendant critique of the work itself. The activity of writing this section of the thesis as an integral part of the process of creating a performance event means that, at certain points, the distance between the *doing* and the *writing* may well be too brief to allow thoughts to develop to an informative degree. If this should happen, creating a chapter of variable worth to respective readers, then it is hoped that those same readers will



not lose too much faith with the thesis itself. Whilst it will seem to some readers inevitable that a chapter (*this* chapter) written during the process of rehearsal is essentially a draft, subject to suggestion, criticism and revision. It is the very linking in time of Chapter Two with the period of developing the text of *At Last Sight* into a performance that makes the work what it is. Accordingly, and heuristically, this chapter is commenced with no real idea as to where it might lead or by what it might be led, or even whether it will emerge as one chapter or more. It is thus as lacking in any projected sense of closure as the production itself. The fact that this is being entered into without reservation is central to the work and to the ways in which the work is subsequently understood by future spectator/readers.

15-10-98

Because of the nature of this simultaneous doing and recording, it is necessary here to lay some theoretical foundations. Again, however, I am uncertain as to the extent to which I am creating and installing foundations as opposed to exposing those already extant positionings, which underpin the work being made. In many ways the work cannot be made other than from the theoretical positions I already occupy. The determinants mentioned in the introduction to this thesis have not disappeared and they still govern even the most seemingly intuitive approaches. The following paragraphs then are offered as an attempt at articulating those theoretically discernible phenomena, which are fuelling the practical decisions and suggestions being made to the cast of *At Last Sight*. Accordingly, that which I am now writing is not dissimilar to the words I have spoken to the performers. As an exercise in *teaching* as much as *directing*, I am duty-bound to discuss the rationale behind ideas, to foster a climate of developing confidence and collaboration amongst what amounts to an *ad hoc* and self-selecting group of students. A group,



furthermore, of varying abilities and experiences. The students, all of them, wanted to know something about the 'structure' of the work, about how it might 'look', about the type of performative 'attitudes' they might be asked to adopt. None of the members of the group, for example, have any experience of entering into a production where they are not playing 'characters'. Although each member of the group has encountered a variety of methods of making work, they would, by almost any definition of the terms, be regarded as 'unskilled' and 'inexperienced' performers. They are less than comfortable with the idea of an absence of fixity, which means that I may be tempted to give them more clues at this stage as to where the work might lead than I would by choice.<sup>7</sup>

One of the particular challenges about this triple-module in performance is that the participating students are not selected by the tutor/directors. The students choose the projects and we, the staff, have no say in the people we get. This is a given, and these words are not offered as a complaint. It would be foolish (though not without precedent) for a tutor in this situation to propose a project on the assumption that certain favoured students would automatically enrol.<sup>8</sup>

The challenge comes in making work without the dubious advantage of having formulated ideas to 'fit' specific students. Working without pre-formed conceptions of the students involved with *At Last Sight* is appropriate to the process. Just as I do not know where the work is going, so I had no prior idea of who would be taking it there. Looking at the cast members as we meet is revealing. There are, even at this early point, identifiable traits that they are carrying with them. One is nervous about the idea of performing *per se*, which was



a rather alarming confession to hear from a student electing this pathway. Another has a voice that never varies from the same ultra-steady monotone; another seems unable to direct text or attention at anybody else within the performance-frame without flicking his eyes towards the audience-area; another 'acts' in a manner bordering on the melodramatic. To their credit, they each appear eager to give their all to the project, and I have no serious misgivings about any of them. What little mention I make here of their performative peculiarities is not meant to patronise; on the contrary, it is an inevitability of the recognition of my own directorial inadequacies that makes me mourn the absence of a group of more highly skilled performers. As they, in their own turn, may come to mourn the absence of a more skilled director.

**16-10-98**

One of the first questions asked by the group about *At Last Sight* was about narrative. As this was the group's first concern, I shall begin there, although as the reader will note, the word is only used at this stage as a means of opening and broadening the area of discussion. I explained to the students that notions of narrative - much stronger to me now than they were just one week ago - alongside notions of character (vague but nevertheless apparent) were leading to questions of semiotics. Of what is intended to be significant in this work: of how I wish, or am imagining the audience to enter into the world of the performance. Ideas as to reality and artifice, which seemed to be driving me towards the project, are being joined as I write by issues of narratology and theme. As though that which once was concerned primarily with performative and non-performative states, with 'acted truth' and 'presented lies' is now being made to attend to issues of what might almost amount to plot-conveyance. This does not mean that the production-



work will be allowed to drift too far away from my original intent. Indeed, the postmodern preoccupation with discerning signs from reality and also the phenomenologists' approach of a direct contact between an observer and an object or event which is classified as 'art' are still relevant to the ways the work might now develop. As also are those 'might have beens' of the way that it was shaping up to be before *people*, that sometimes-frustrating given of performance, altered my own insidious form of closure in the guise of freedom.

17-10-98

My 'ideas' for the first stages of rehearsal are being influenced by my interest in *Joiners*, a photomontage by the artist, David Hockney. *Joiners* has been utilised by Reinelt and Roach in an introductory explanation to the fields of structuralism and deconstruction.<sup>9</sup> It was through their incisive relocation of a purely visual form into the realms of performance that my own long-standing interest in Hockney's work, and particularly of *Joiners*, was both accelerated and enhanced. Approached as a paradigm for the ways in which work is read, *Joiners* provides an interesting way into performance, a way which is not suggested by Reinelt and Roach, and which is demonstrative of the processes through which the viewing of aestheticised objects is undertaken. If sections of performance are regarded in a similar way to frames of Hockney's work, both as being possessed of individual matrixes and also as part of a larger 'whole', then it is possible to set up a system of signs whereby the 'meaning' for each section is resident within its relationship to, *and position with*, those other sections which are located before, after or even at the same time as the section itself. This is the nature of theatre direction and the essence of montage, but approaching direction in a fashion analogous to Hockney's serves to



foreground more directly the semiological connections that combine to form systems of signs.

In *Joiners*, just as a number of photographs are presented, so “different ways of seeing come into prominence and recede.”<sup>10</sup> In a similar way, Hockney’s creation of a grid, which is only apparent by the positioning of individual photographic images, creates a template for the ways in which *At Last Sight* might be constructed. Ferdinand Saussure posited the theory that individual ‘units of meaning’ only ever gain whatever meaning they possess when they are held in comparison to other signs.<sup>11</sup> To the extent that “any individual element is meaningless outside the confines of that structure.”<sup>12</sup> In the same way, the scenic elements that make up the performance event of *At Last Sight* will derive their meaning from the relativity of their position to the bracketing created by the proximity of other scenes. The ‘scenes’ are thus offered as individual units at the same time as they are joined (to use the Hockneyesque term) by their relationship to the whole.

It will be useful here to ascertain the sense in which certain terms used in these introductory remarks is offered. Notwithstanding the broad familiarity, which most students of Drama have of the area of semiotics, it is apparent that the language itself is prone to a degree of ambiguity.<sup>13</sup> With regard to the notion of systems of signs, there will be evidence in the following pages of a debt to Saussure, for whom the sign is composed of two parts, a material *signifier*, a word, spoken or written, an image, and a *signified*, a concept. There is no essential relationship between signifier and signified, only a culturally agreed link. In this way, signs are



seen to operate as part of a *system* and their meanings (*sic*) derive directly from their relationship to the other signs within the system. They are unable to function as individual *logos* of identical, or even similar, meaning if they are isolated from that system. In subsequent paragraphs, I will refer to the *referent*, a term employed to considerable effect by Roland Barthes. 'Referent' means the actual object, image or action which is referred to at any given moment in the work: so that, whilst a performer, Sarah Robertson, for example, is always Sarah Robertson, she is also, although not *always*, a referent for something (someone) else. Already it seems as though I am predicting a production wherein the independence and autonomy of each 'moment', when located in a sometimes contradictory or juxtapositional relationship to other moments, will lead the spectator towards a questioning of the overall 'meaning' of the work. It may be the case, and a part of me clearly *intends* it to be so, that the spectator is also invited to question the extent to which it is possible to derive any conclusive meaning from performance at all.

Within this projected method of rehearsal, the biological presence of the one who refers is as important as that which is referenced. The created performance of *At Last Sight* is of a no greater consideration than the exposed pattern of signs contained in the production in both its 'moments' and its entirety. As the eye shifts through time so the spectator will be encouraged to see the scenes as singular signs. The referent images (of scene, of sense, of *other*) are fractured and the signifiers and signifieds may confuse or even bar the way towards 'understanding'. This will result (and I am aware of the dangers, and contradictions, of speaking of 'results' at the start of rehearsal) in the raising of questions as to the possibility of deciding upon any stable meaning whatsoever. At this point, I should perhaps turn



towards a post-structuralist view, to better see how it is that the reduction of emphasis on the signified, and the increased focus on the signifiers, will provide indications as to a spectator's *directed* reading of *At Last Sight*. If the meaning of each sign within the system is dependent upon its difference to other signs, then the overall creation or, indeed, identification of meaning becomes unstable. Each 'scene' within *At Last Sight* (I could say 'moment' or 'section') will have its own relationship to the surrounding scenes and its meaning will be identifiable by its difference to its neighbours. I can go further and say that each scene will gain its meaning or its concept (its *signified*) from its similarities to its neighbours. Each and every performative moment is a sign comprised of a signifier (the image) and a signified (the concept). Within its own specific frame a signified of its own small referent is offered, whereas when the spectator begins (or is allowed) to add these moments together the referent becomes larger and the network and interplay of signs begins to build into a system. The written text of *At Last Sight*, as it currently stands, has itself been constructed in this way.

The building of the system here will probably not, however, fully add up. The overall meaning of the system may emerge as somewhat greater than the sum of the signs, and aspects may well emerge in the work which are at once both within the system at the same time as they are unidentifiable as discrete and functional signs. As Derrida has written, "the movement of signification adds something ... to supplement a lack on the part of the signified",<sup>14</sup> and it is this added extra element, the 'transcendental signifier',<sup>15</sup> to use Derrida's term, that allows the spectator to become the ultimate creator of meaning. 'Sense' is thus defined by the way in



which the signs are read and by the receptive weight given to the elements seen rather than by the semiotic potency of the signs.

18-10-98

The *At Last Sight* of this point of rehearsal is revealing itself as intrinsically postmodernist. It is not my intention to submit *At Last Sight* to its spectators as a paradigm of postmodern performance. Postmodernism has already passed into the *passé*, to the extent that formulaic lists of its tendencies have been published.<sup>16</sup>

Where postmodernism still seems to possess vitality is in its refusal to fix and its disinclination to close down. If postmodernism is identifiable by one element, that element is contained in a shifting away from readily rationalised solutions. Where postmodernism has moved towards an awareness that the very tools and techniques we have been using to free ourselves from ignorance have themselves become enslaving doctrines it has left behind a philosophy that I remain happy to embrace. Postmodernism, although differing to a degree in terms of the specificity of some concepts and ideologies, can be said to subsume post-structuralism, and, as such, postmodern notions of performance making will be providing an umbrella underneath which this project is to be made.<sup>17</sup>

If we distrust and ultimately deny the idea of grand-scheme solutions, then we begin to see that the shift from a belief in something being an *original* to the awareness that everything is a *copy* leads inevitably towards a questioning of the validity and 'realness' of all things.<sup>18</sup> It is certainly the case that these feelings are informing my ideas for the work. This continues to be the case even though, at this point, all that has emerged is a vague idea of performers playing out the 'roles' of



the performance with varying degrees of certainty, so that issues of ‘acting’, of ‘being’, of ‘truth’ and of ‘lies’ permeate the fabric of the work.

Even in writing these words, however, I am aware of my own unspoken inclinations towards a type of essentialism. As though a belief in truth – in something that matters – is within me, despite my embracing of notions of simulacrum *ad infinitum*. Writing the word truth without the qualification created by inverted commas or italicisation leads to a heady sensation: a queasiness brought on by risk and *naivety* in equal measures. If a gnawing essentialism runs counter to postmodern *chic* then so be it. This thesis is not intended as a mantra towards the idols of our age. If I did not believe in some form of redemptive qualities in the making of art (I have more doubts as to the possibilities of redemption through spectatorship) then I would not be trawling my own past for the written material of *At Last Sight*. Richer and more profound material is all around. I believe in redemption and I believe in truth. What concerns me is my ability (or otherwise) to recognise either if or when they appear.

Notwithstanding this, I am continuing to work within and through an ostensible distrust of reality, just as postmodern performance strategies invite their audiences to deny authoritarian solutions through the adoption of a sceptically slanted gaze. If “the notion that our experience of reality is organised and determined by the images we make of it”<sup>19</sup> is a true one, then the sentiment is appropriate to *At Last Sight*. It is so inasmuch as the work undertaken in rehearsal is designed to create a production wherein ideas of reality are brought into question by a process of looking clearly and with *knowing doubt* at the images we are making of the



performance. Baudrillard has attempted to remove our reliance on the word 'signs', replacing them with *codes*, which are seen to exist as unshifting points of reference. Although Baudrillard might follow the Saussurian concept that "no object exists in isolation from others",<sup>20</sup> this Baudrillardian 'code' is actually replacing the sign. It is not only the reproduction of the referent, it *is* the referent, and the two have become indistinguishable, indeterminable one from the other.

*At Last Sight* is thus a system of codes which, working in relation to each other, (re)produce the referent. Baudrillard forces us to stop searching for the referent: the search is futile as there are no 'real' originals and everything is already a reproduction and representation ... "the difference between copy and original is redundant."<sup>21</sup> *At Last Sight* is claiming that the referent can be viewed from another position, the position of the creation of meaning. In this way - and this is central to the starting position - the moments refer to the referent, but the referent *is* the referral. What the spectator sees then is image and comment in one ... the two phenomena exist interdependently and cannot be separated.

This ideological and directorial perspective has arisen out of a searching for a practical method of dealing with a shift that I have begun to recognise in my own thinking. The shift is from a search for explanations within the prescribed and directorial forms provided in performance towards a realisation that the referent's meaning always resides within the spectator, which is the very stuff of heuristics. The interpretation and decision of a performance is never other than individualised. It is a series of meanings to which no universal or standardised explanation can fully apply. That it is the 'I' of the spectator and not the 'I' of the director who



determines meaning. Accordingly, my own directorial practice must strive, if I am in any practical sense committed to the idea of progression, towards an accommodation of this theoretical positioning. The difficulty occurs because of the realisation that these idealised notions of personal contextualisation are contaminated by the social and cultural determinants of thought which this thesis keeps returning to. In this way, the cultural circumstances which encapsulate every spectator's frame of reference will be what determines the interpretation. The director's role is subject to a deep and contradictory disturbance, for what is *it* that I am seeking to direct my individual spectator's attention towards? How can I *direct* the performers if I have so little idea of where we are going?

**23-10-98**

Clark Moustakis, in detailing the specifics of his own research procedures, also provides a telling treatise on creative, rather than interpretative, direction. If we substitute Moustakis' words 'learning' and 'searches' for 'direction' and 'directing' the similarities emerge with immediacy

Learning that proceeds heuristically has a path of its own. It is self-directed, self-motivated, and open to spontaneous shift. It defies the shackles of convention and tradition.... It pushes beyond the known, the expected, or the merely possible. Without the restraining leash of formal hypotheses, and free from external methodological structures that limit awareness or channel it, the one who searches heuristically may draw upon the perceptual powers afforded by direct experience.<sup>22</sup>

**24-10-98**

To add yet another complexity to the issue, my own acknowledged determinants include Roland Barthes. It was Barthes who, within the space provided by the short publication that was *Camera Lucida*,<sup>23</sup> set up an *examination* of the nature of



photographs. In so doing he initiated a discourse on the principles of absence and presence which has formed the mainstay of much subsequent writings on performance. For Barthes, "a specific photograph, in effect, is never distinguished from its referent,"<sup>24</sup> creating a tautological dimension to photography in which the referent is always present. Indeed, Barthes goes on to postulate that the referent is all that can ever exist, that the photograph is invisible and absent because it is the referent that consumes our gaze. Barthes' ideas of photographic absence are important to the creative processes behind *At Last Sight*, which is not to suggest that I have as yet located a comfortable method of dealing with them.

If it is not possible to separate a theatrically constructed image from its referent, if there is an inextricable binding together of the two. Then the successful attempt to remove the referent (if such an act is possible) would be to render the image as referentially neutral, as nothing other than itself. It follows then that in applying Barthes' views to *At Last Sight* (or to generic performance) it would be possible to remove the problem of assigning signifiers and signified to the performance event. In so doing it would turn the spectator's gaze to the referent, to the performer as communicator and communicated. The compositional element of each performed image can and will consist of signification, inasmuch as an aesthetic directorial (directional?) control will be in evidence. But in allowing the spectator to see that every scene within the production is the result of a conscious decision, of *choice*, a suggestion will be made that it is that choice which is significant rather than the ideas that are contained in the referentiality of acted 'other'.



Hints of phenomenology are emerging here. At least to the extent that we can recognise that “phenomenologists like to pick up objects ... turn them around, examining them from all sides ... (and that) this cannot be accomplished by viewing them frontally as they are embedded in the rest of the experiential world.”<sup>25</sup> If there is an underlying conceptual distinction between semiology and phenomenology it is that whilst with the former everything relates to something else (we could even say that everything *is* something else) in the latter case everything is nothing *but* itself. In this sense, a phenomenological position is informing the notions I have of the way the rehearsals of *At Last Sight* might develop towards performance. It is impacting on the ways that I would wish the work to be read; although we would do well to remind ourselves that phenomenology allows research without *direct* experience, whereas heuristics demands a full experiential engagement. Seen in this way, a phenomenological approach may be of value to a spectator in much the same way that a heuristic approach functions for the researcher/maker who has experienced an ongoing contact with the work.

Before proceeding further with this, however, I need first to make some decisions as to how this is likely to happen. In stating this I am recognising, as has been pointed out in earlier sections of this work, that the onus of analysis is already inclining me towards ways of working which are not normative within my own previous experience. What I mean by this is that I have never in the past, when working on productions, sought to document directorial inclinations in the way that I am attempting here.<sup>26</sup> A consequence of this is that notions of the work on *At Last Sight* as constituting a case study of a *production* from idea to realisation



are flawed before the event. What is being undertaken is an overt example of practice as research, which differs from practice for the sake of practice itself.

Phenomenologically then, it is possible to approach *At Last Sight* as a developing object in its own right, to see it as a part of the empirical world, and to look at it in those terms. We can analyse *At Last Sight*, for example, in the same way that one could study a pebble or a blade of grass, not as elements of a coastline or a field, but as nothing more or less than the things themselves. Alternatively, we could say that *At Last Sight* will exist in a co-present state, whereby the empirical world is put on hold. In this way we accept that the production is at once an attempt to seduce the spectator into a suspension of belief in reality at the same time as it activates a belief in the illusionary. It is this second approach that most powerfully engages me as a theoretical 'ideal' that might, perhaps, lead the work into an interesting location. In this way, at least in my directorial imaginings, the spectator will be invited not so much to make an empirical inspection of the performance as to provide an imaginative intuition of it. If this is in any way successful, if it results in an ability to view *At Last Sight* as an event removed from its cultural and empirical connotations and if it frees the spectator to regard it as something which exists within its own frame of reference ... then the work will have achieved much of that which is being targeted. That in art all things function as they are perceived and that the event's relation to the percipient is ultimately the only one that matters.

In this, phenomenology flirts with postmodernism, at once embracing an absence of mass meaning at the same time as it prioritises individual absorption. Bert O.



States tells us that it is the “first four seconds” that are the most vital in our process of determination.<sup>27</sup> That the empirical world is put on hold as we trust only our connection with that which we see. And yet, it is this previously experienced outside world which has provided us with the library of seemingly intuitive references, which in their own turn allow us to arrive at the ‘immediate’ and untrammelled perceptions of States’ understanding of phenomenological immediacy.

What a phenomenological approach does provide is a position whereby the debate as to the location and efficacy of signs becomes an irrelevance. The act of negotiation leading to meaning emerges as the sole responsibility of the percipient and it is s/he and s/he alone who must create a signification between performative moments and their relationship to a referent as and when they occur. Having said this, it should be pointed out that *At Last Sight* contains its share of semiotic indicators, some of which are deliberately misleading ... or deliberately ‘leading’. In a recent conversation between the performers and myself,<sup>28</sup> we began to discuss notions of truth in art. We discussed particularly the difficulty, or ‘impossibility’ as one member of the group, Sarah Robertson put it, of creating moments wherein the spectators might reasonably be expected to doubt the artifice of any given action. With extremes of physical behaviour this is relatively simple. The dancer’s exhaustion might be tangibly ‘real’, just as in suspending his body by steel hooks Stelarc moves beyond the theatrical requirements of a suspended disbelief; and yet the question is more complex when we deal with emotions, with emotional ‘truths’.

28-10-98



After discussing these ideas of 'truth', 'lies' and 'belief' with the group (inverted commas again: the absence felt like too much risk) we have decided to advertise the group as a collective of lovers, current and ex, and to include this false fact in any and all pre-production publicity. (It is important to note that this is the first time I am able to use the word 'we' in this thesis without any feelings of trying to conjure up a false sense of democracy.) The decision was not a whimsical one and neither was it intended to cause mischief. In terms of theatre, we are strongly predisposed to believe what we read about the company in question precisely because the written information is seen to exist beyond the frame of performance. This is so because the power of the written word is derived in part at least from its permanence. If I read that Goat Island is a performance collective from Chicago, I believe it because I have no reason to doubt it, and also because printed words afford the claim a different and more pressing type of authority to words uttered in performance. If the sleeve notes from Gavin Bryars' *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet* tell me that the voice heard is that of a homeless man in London, now dead, I not only believe them whole-heartedly but the experience of listening to the compact disc is radically affected by that belief. Similarly, if programme notes exist to tell me something of the genesis of the work I am about to see, then why would I distrust them? A woman tells a man, in performance, that she loves him ... it is performance *ergo* I (have to) doubt the voracity of the sentiment. If the same woman is described in a programme as being the same man's lover, I believe it entirely and without question.

**4-11-98**

The decision to advertise the group thus has opened up what appears to be a new way of working: simple activities and encounters are 'loaded' differently and the



performers' on-stage behaviour seems suddenly much less mannered. It has to be said that a part of the rationale behind this before the event decision is the hope that it will disguise some of the technical inadequacies of the individual members of the group. Certainly, I feel more confident about the piece now that it is (and we are) set to sail under this new and false banner. It carries with it the assumption, and it may be one that I make overt, that the group has been formed because of their emotional connections, rather than as an auditioned and selected *troupe*. As such, it may be the case that spectators read the work as something other than performance in the pursuit of polished excellence. It is much more of a salve here to my own insecurities than any damning critique of the performers *per se*.

The students and I are attempting to extend the frame of the performance to the extent where, in effect, the spectators are unaware of the point where the work starts and finishes. There seems little alternative to this. If the spectators were to know that the information they receive is untrue, then the frame would still be extended but the rationale behind it would be ruined. To this end, I have written to the organisers of the festival, RITU 16, in Liege (see Appendix 3), involving them without their agreement in the duplicity of the misinformation. It is still too early to foresee the implications of this deceit on the way the work of *At Last Sight* will develop. The vagaries of student-timetabling, alongside my own teaching and tutorial commitments means that we have only met as a group on seven occasions - but I have no doubts that the lie will drive the piece in directions we had never previously considered.

11-11-98



This raises the question of the extent to which my words on these pages are to be believed by the reader. As a self-confessed dealer in 'lies' in one form, that knowledge will compromise the integrity of 'truths' in another. The assumption of honesty afforded by the reader may have been lost in the last few paragraphs. All I can hope is that a distinction can be made between telling the truth about lies and disguising lies as truth. As this thesis is not about 'explaining things' so much as analysing my own processes as they relate to *At Last Sight*, I make no claims for (or against) one approach over another. We - the group and I - are telling lies to our hosts. I am attempting an honest documentation of the process of making *At Last Sight*, even when that process involves dishonesty. The reader can trust the tale if not quite still the teller.

**26-11-98**

In the sense of analysing the processes of the construction of *At Last Sight*, it is appropriate here to include a section on *why* certain things are being done. To push the analysis towards the documentation of a particular rehearsal, which will also make the members of the group known more fully to the reader. To this end, I will detail the events of our eighth rehearsal, on Thursday, November 26th, 1998 at 9.00 a.m.

Firstly, I shall describe the space. We meet and work always, so far at least, in a room in the Drama Department at University College Chester; this room is known informally as the 'Workshop'. It is a smaller version of the Drama Studio, which is now taken over almost entirely by classes in Dance. I have not chosen the space. Each production-group has been allocated a rehearsal space and the Workshop is ours. The Workshop measures 9.70 metres by 6.41 and is 3.75 metres high, with



suspended lights. A scale drawing of the space is included as Appendix 4, alongside similar drawings of performance venues to be used. A sound and lighting rig is fixed to the wall. The walls are wooden, as is the floor, which is made up of solid blocks, and is not 'sprung'. Black canvas curtains hang from steel bars. Access is *via* the Drama Studio, with an additional alarmed emergency exit, which leads out to the car park. There is one other locked and non-functioning door. The space is never 'clean', with the residue of previous classes and rehearsals propped against various walls. On November 26th, for example, in addition to our own materials, a full-size coffin, a lectern, a flip chart, two note pads, a bag, a cardigan, a wardrobe and a large corrugated and transparent rigid plastic sheet were in the space. This is in addition to a number of dismantled staging units, which are stored more or less permanently against the radiator-free wall.

The temperature in the room is warm in the winter and warmer still in summer, with the radiators timed to come on daily, regardless of climate and conditions. Despite a departmental policy of no food and/or drink in working spaces, members of staff tend to work to their own agendas. So that, for instance, the first two members of the group, Elizabeth Hague and Sarah Robertson, are already in the space, drinking from cans of *Coca-Cola*, when I arrive at 8.55 for the 9.00 a.m. start.

The relaxation of the non-drinking policy is symptomatic of a generally relaxed working relationship between the group-members and myself. There is a clear hierarchy in place, of course, with the students regarding me as a lecturer who happens to be directing them in a piece of theatre. The relationship when I direct



students in productions is pre-determined by the knowledge those students have of my role as a member of academic staff. For example, the students know that their working processes will have ramifications on their ultimate assessment, which cannot fail to alter the ways in which they function. Similarly, my own approach to directing, as has already been mentioned, is bound up with my role as a lecturer. Notwithstanding this, my aim is that the relationship *feels* like one between performers and director rather than students and lecturer. Relaxing some of those 'rules' which might be regarded as informing teaching policy within the department, in favour of a less pedantic approach to eating and drinking is one way of moving towards this state. What I am saying here is that I *want* the relationship to be one of director and performers.

The space has already been 'set' by Elizabeth and Sarah. Our set consists, at present, of a single metal bed, five metal chairs with grey plastic backs and seats, a small wooden table and a larger steel table-like structure. Because the dimensions of the Workshop are considerably smaller than the theatre space in Liege, and also of the auditorium in Molloy Hall, where *At Last Sight* will be performed in May 1999, we are having to work with the length of the room as its width. This means that the students are able to move in a manner that approximates to the projected performance, with the downside being that I, in the position of a spectator, am too close in to the 'on-stage' work to be able to read it from any 'true' perspective. This means that I am forced to watch everything in a quite extreme close-up. An examination of the plan of the space will support this feeling.



The bed is centre-stage left, placed on a diagonal line; one chair is next to the bed, another is downstage right. The small table is up-stage centre; the steel 'table' is up-stage left, almost directly behind the bed. The set is designed to indicate rather than resemble a hotel room.

The following paragraphs will provide brief thumbnail sketches of the participants. I will not attempt to describe their physical appearances, other than to say what they were wearing on the occasion of this particular rehearsal. Reproductions of Polaroid photographs of the group will be appended to this thesis. These will provide the reader with far more accurate visual evidence than my words could achieve. Where I begin to describe something of the attitudes and abilities of individual members of the group I do so because the students are integral to the process of making the work. If my descriptions are brief, it is because at this point in rehearsals I do not want to enter (even privately) into issues of judgement. Judgement will come. My role as one of the assessors of the students demands it, as will my role here as the disseminator of the experience of making *At Last Sight*. It is a question *at this time* of focusing on the needs of the practice.

As I entered the Workshop, Elizabeth Hague was lying on the bed and Sarah Robertson was seated on a chair, which had been pulled close by. Elizabeth was wearing calf-length blue jeans, black boots and a blue and white striped shirt of the type worn by butchers. Sarah was wearing a long dark skirt, plimsolls and a light brown shirt. We spoke our greetings. Of the two, I know Elizabeth rather better than I do Sarah, although I am not aware that this is leading to any tangible difference in the ways in which either of these young women relate to me.



Elizabeth and Sarah are both twenty years old, as are all members of the group, with the exception of Chris Roberts, who is older. Elizabeth is the stronger performer, by which I mean that she is able to dominate a space, or scene, to a relatively high standard; she is also more able than Sarah to make sense of lines of text as she speaks them. There is a certain narrowness of range, to be expected in a student pursuing Drama as part of a programme of Combined Study (with English, in this case) rather than as a Single Honours subject.<sup>29</sup> Regardless of this limitation, Elizabeth is a student whom most of my colleagues would have welcomed in their production-groups. She is the one member of the group for whom a career in performance seems appropriate.

Sarah Robertson is less dynamic a performer than Liz. She is able to bring a reasonable veneer of sensitivity to her performance work, but she moves in an awkward fashion and is uncomfortable with any type of vocal projection. There is a discernible *quality* to Sarah's work, but this is handicapped by a public reticence to any externalised display of mood. Sarah's contribution towards ideas is as strong as anyone else's in the group, and yet I have reservations as to her ability to embrace fully enough with the idea of public performance. A feature of the work at University College Chester is that Level 3 students can opt for a triple-module in performance without having any prior experience of performing publicly, other than in very brief presentations as part of taught classes. Sarah Robertson is one such student. I have to be concerned that Sarah has never managed a rehearsal without 'freezing', turning out to me and telling me that she cannot remember what to say. My use of the word 'never' is no exaggeration. At least once every time we meet I tell the student that the one thing the performance will not be able



to withstand is this sort of breaking down ... apart from anything else, it exposes the 'acted' nature of her fellow performers' moments of seeming, or supposed, not-knowingness. Even after so few meetings, Sarah's uncertainty is telling. This is frustrating, because the 'quality' I mentioned earlier is one of engagement. She performs as though she *feels*. One's attention is drawn to her because of this and once there it stays.

The next student to arrive was Christopher Roberts. At twenty-six, he is older than his peers. He is the most academically able of the group, with a keen interest in politics, critical theory and literature. At times, he appears to take his studies seriously to the point of taking little pleasure from them: work is to be worked at. As a performer, Chris is at times quite painfully shy, with a habit of looking towards his audience for what seems like a sign or signs of approval.<sup>30</sup> He has a tendency towards a mumbled inarticulation and, like Sarah, has a stilted manner of moving when in performance. My relationship with Chris is a good one, even within the context of the 'good' relationships I share with each of the members of the group. Chris sat on a chair to the left of the set as I look at it, and said hello to Elizabeth and Sarah. He then asked me whether I had seen *Ronin*, a newly released film starring Robert De Niro. Chris works part-time at the local Virgin Cinema, where he is duty manager, with authority for the planning and execution of film 'seasons'. I answered that I had not seen the film. Chris was wearing blue jeans, white training shoes, and a grey sweatshirt. He was carrying a waterproof dark blue jacket. At this point, just after nine a.m., Glenn Robertson, Sarah Skelton and Andrew Proudfoot walked in. Sarah and Glenn share a house together some five minutes' walk from campus. Andrew lives some distance further.



Glenn was wearing black jeans, white training shoes, a white shirt and a short black jacket. Andrew was dressed in a white sports shirt and dark blue trousers. He was wearing blue canvas training shoes and a jacket, similar in design and colour to the one Chris was carrying. Sarah Skelton was wearing a lilac T-shirt, black drawstring trousers and blue training shoes. She wore no jacket. Sarah is always well groomed. She is fastidious about her appearance and never arrives for rehearsal without having first applied make-up.

Glenn Robertson is a confident performer, although the limitations within his range are becoming apparent as we work. It is difficult to gauge his responses to *At Last Sight*; his role as captain of the college football team undoubtedly affects his demeanour within the subject of Drama. Glenn is unusual inasmuch as he combines Sports Science with Drama - a rarely elected combination at Chester - and he seems equally comfortable in each area, although his strongest commitment is to sport. His behaviour and appearance serve to locate him as a student of Sport more than Drama, and yet, despite the evidence of success as an athlete (he is a semi-professional goalkeeper), Glenn has decided to major in Drama in this the final year of his studies. As Glenn's personal tutor, I know him well and our relationship is relaxed. There are no discipline problems with Glenn, as, in fairness, I have to say there are with none of the group, and the relaxation of any authority I might carry with me shows no signs of leading towards either laziness or the taking of liberties. I have told the group that we are all looking for the same thing from this triple-module: that the work is good and that it will not and cannot be so unless we all work well. This sounds trite, but I wanted to emphasise the fact that we are in this



together - the students know that the work forms a major part of my own research - and that we are each responsible one to the other.

Sarah Skelton is, along with Elizabeth Hague, the most competent performer in the group, at least at this point. She can deal with changes of mood, pace and tone to a greater degree than the remaining six and has demonstrated a keen intelligence in matters of working through the text and selecting words which might compliment the theatrical moments we are seeking to create. Her delivery, albeit raw at times, is always matched to the mood and sense she wishes to present. Most importantly, Sarah seems very comfortable with the idea of stillness and silence, not feeling that she needs to be moving or speaking to appear as an integral element of the stage event. Other members of the group do this, but at present they all reveal a tendency towards an attitude of 'off-stage' whilst 'on', which is not always the effect we are striving for. Of the group, Sarah Skelton and Elizabeth Hague are the most pleasing to work with. This is so because they appear to possess the ability to tune in to the work on a level which is both internal and external, whereas the others, at least at present, are only able to offer an either/or.

Andrew Proudfoot is, at the moment, unable to act naturally ... and I am aware in using these words that any drama specialists reading this thesis will recognise the seemingly 'natural' as an elusive state to achieve.<sup>31</sup> I am not, therefore, intending to suggest that acting in a way which approximates to natural off-stage behaviour is an easy thing to achieve, but with Andrew the difference between the two is so pronounced that he appears almost puppet-like when he moves in performance.



This is leading to difficulty. On the one hand, as a lecturer, I am bound to provide a parity of opportunity for the performers within the group, on the other, as a director, I need to make *At Last Sight* come together as a piece over which I have considerable control. Andrew has already asked if I can provide him with a scene wherein he 'acts' (his term), in order that he feels more confident of achieving a high mark in assessment. The truth of it is that I do not believe that the interests of Andrew's assessment are best served by his being seen in a section where he seeks to convince his audience (his assessors) of the visible truth of a structured lie *via* a naturalistic process of performance.

I can go further and state that I do not believe that *At Last Sight* would be well served by this. Conversely, I do not wish to reduce Andrew's confidence by telling him this. At the moment, time is still on our side. This means that I am able to stall in a way which probably reads to Andrew as no more than a waiting for the 'right' idea for the 'right' scene to come together and then to offer him that scene as a platform for his work. I have explained that the project is intrinsically concerned with arriving at performances which are appropriate to the piece, rather than creating moments to serve each performer's individual agenda. However, inasmuch as *At Last Sight* has declared itself to be concerned with issues of truth and lies, of art with a maximum *and* minimum of artifice, then I can see little chance of carrying off the myth that apparently 'truthful' performance moments are without currency.

Anna Garnett is the last of the students to arrive, and she does so some twenty minutes after the time we were due to meet. She apologises for her lateness and I



tell her that it is okay. Anna was wearing a grey woollen fur-collared coat, black trousers, flat shoes and a grey sweater. Like Sarah Skelton, Anna is always neat in her appearance. Anna has emerged as the weakest performer in the group. She seems to be always a beat or two behind the rest of the students. In terms of the theoretical framework within which *At Last Sight* is functioning, Anna appears lost. Issues of fragmentation make no sense to her, and she has made no contribution so far to any ideas for where the work might go. She is a pleasant girl, and popular within the group, and yet she is also noticeably reserved, almost distant. She is not a figure I have ever seen on campus unless she has been travelling to and from lectures. Anna's is the monotone voice mentioned earlier.

As the writer of at least some of the words she is speaking, I am probably more concerned about Anna's vocal limitations than I would be if we were working on a published text. Hearing the words spoken in the fashion that Anna has no choice but to adopt is a disconcerting experience.<sup>32</sup> So far, I have not tried to push any of the students towards a serious examination of their own weaknesses. It seems at this stage to be a question of inducement *via* the carrot rather than the stick. What I am cautious about is getting myself into a situation where I am being critical of the students for not doing certain things without also being able to tell them what those 'things' are. Because I am committed to *At Last Sight* being a group-project (*this* group-project) it is not easy for me to be critical of the group for not being more able performers than they are. Who and what they are will make *At Last Sight* what it will be.



There is also the issue of the confidence of members of the group. The confidence of student-performers is a massive issue. Their skin tends to be thin inasmuch as they have not yet become accustomed to the harsh criticism which more seasoned performers have to bear. It is hard to take criticisms of one's own work other than personally, and I speak here from my own experience as much as from twenty years of dialogue with performers and artists from a variety of disciplines.

On one level, I have no problems with this. Like all lecturers in this discipline, I am well aware that my directorial role has a link with a series of wider and more pastoral responsibilities. We are, after all, concerned with the Liberal Arts' ideal of assisting our students on their journey towards a position of rounded individuality, rather than (merely) providing either routes towards successful assessment or some sort of academically approved professional training.<sup>33</sup> It sometimes has to be said, however, that the link is a difficult one to work with. The extent to which a director/tutor should go in order to 'push' a student towards the performance s/he might be felt capable of achieving is not always an easy one to determine. Thankfully, it does not appear to be an issue of any weight with *At Last Sight*, but nevertheless an issue it remains. It is perhaps the central paradox of practice as research *for the tutor* that the research in question is almost always mediated by the performing students' abilities to make the ideas tangible in performance. Viewing the work like this, as a project of no less importance to myself as to the group of participating students, then it is reasonable to assume that I should be afforded the freedom to drive the students hard, and to drive them in the directions I see fit. In practice, however, this 'freedom' is tempered by the needs of the students and by my own contractual obligations to provide satisfactory opportunities for the



students to function in a supportive and democratic working environment. To this end, *At Last Sight*, like all such work, is compromised by dint of its necessary (and, I have to say, appropriate) curricular relevance.

The issue, made overt in recent paragraphs, of student-confidentiality, of ethics, is the most troubling to me. To what extent am I justified, in pursuit of my own ends, to reveal what amount to no more than my impressions of either the inadequacies or insecurities of the cast? Certainly, the students are all aware of the fact that I am documenting the processes of *At Last Sight*. They also know that the printed words can be accessed by any student or library-user who may choose to follow up the information in the abstract of this thesis with a request for the full work. But does this legitimise that which might, quite reasonably, be regarded as a betrayal of the confidence of rehearsal? I have no answers to this; other than to reiterate the fact that it is my intention to document the processes involved in the making of *At Last Sight* as accurately as possible, and that, inevitably, this procedure disallows the employment of a disproportionately positive perspective.

When the group had settled after Anna's arrival, we started to talk about some different styles or 'states' of performance: imitative, indicative, expressive, descriptive, actual and metaphoric.<sup>34</sup> The conversation was an attempt to deal with a number of issues. One was that, as a module which requires the students to submit a reflective essay for one third of their overall assessment it is imperative that the group are provided with a theoretical underpinning to the work ... although this would be provided and/or encouraged regardless of the need to write. It is a given of the nature of study at this level that the students are possessed of an



ability to trace the footsteps leading to any and all work they make. They need to demonstrate, either in essay or *viva voce* that they are in possession of an appropriately academic and aesthetic frame of reference within which the submitted work can be contextualised. What this means is that rehearsals are never just that. The time spent with the group is always a blend of teaching, training and suggestion and the balance between these elements is in a constant state of flux. Sometimes, like in today's example, the drive towards the creation of performative action is almost totally sacrificed for protracted discussion.

Our individual timetable commitments allow us only sporadic group-contact throughout the week. In addition to this the bulk of the group have had to take paid employment in order to supplement their grants.<sup>35</sup> Taken alongside the fact that the only appropriate practical working spaces on campus are in extremely high demand and, as a consequence, are difficult to gain access to, our time together is limited and dialogue when we could be 'working' often seems to frustrate the students. A clear pattern, almost a schism, began to emerge in the group today in this regard.<sup>36</sup>

**27-11-98**

In attempting to rationalise for the group a sense of why the predominant performance modes we are adopting are either descriptive or actual, inasmuch as neither the text we are working from nor that which we subsequently create is comprised of much 'action', three members of the group took this as an opportunity to bemoan the fact that the work is becoming overly theoretical. The students who felt this, Sarah Robertson, Sarah Skelton and Anna Garnett argued that *At Last Sight* was/is a piece which would not be possessed of broad appeal. I



was not entirely surprised by this perspective, although I do not necessarily agree with it. I responded by saying that almost all of the people who will see the production will be either students, teachers or makers of theatre and that, accordingly, the notion of *At Last Sight* requiring an abundance of those elements one would normally regard as being central to mainstream work was an unnecessary concern. The timing of the concerns (or at least the voicing thereof), coming at the point that it has in the period of making, seems to be both natural and proper. The work is beginning to require an audience of sorts, an 'outside eye' to regard the work afresh and offer feedback as to the ways in which the work is read.

In writing about general issues of making work with students I am aware that I am avoiding the matter of specifics. I am aware also that this drive to dissemble began at the very point where the documentation of individual students' behaviour was just beginning to emerge. Perhaps what it is that has pre-empted this unwillingness to write in any detail about the ways in which the group functions is no more than a primitive type of caution. A fear that to say too much about the students is to invoke the wrath of the idealised ensemble. There is also the feeling that to be critical in private - inasmuch as none of the students will have access to the tenor of these pages until long after they have graduated - is an invidious form of hypocrisy. That it is a praising in public and a subsequent carping in the seclusion of an office after-hours. Writing about a sense of 'team spirit' was never my intention, and, in fact, I can state that the recognition of this has only arrived with the typing of these words. It is dawning on me (and I am more than a little embarrassed to realise how late) that my use of the term 'the group' has been used



exclusively to refer to the seven students, never to the eight of *us* who are pooling our resources to one end.

This is because we, as a group, are now much more aware of the vocabulary of the performance of *At Last Sight*. Whereas at the start of the academic year it was very much a sense of the group being directed it now seems as though the piece is being devised. I write this with a knowledge of the fact that distinctions between ‘devising’ and ‘directing’ are awkward and confused, and that the idea of devising is much more commonly associated with work where no text exists as a dramatic blueprint for performance than in instances such as ours, where the text, being all we had to start with, was imbued with prominence.<sup>37</sup>

## **Chapter Two: Part Two**

11-1-99

As has been stated in the introduction to this thesis, the approach undertaken in this particular example of practice-led research is diachronic, in that the written elements of the submitted thesis are moving through time in a similar way to the practical element of *At Last Sight*. Accordingly, this chapter moves now some six weeks forward ... a new phase if not quite a new chapter.

Many changes have happened and the performance piece is in certain ways unrecognisable from the work of late November. It should be stressed, to anybody who might be reading this work from a non-educational workplace or perspective,

that, in Higher Education at least, studies are suspended for some considerable time during the weeks either side of Christmas. As such, an extended period of inactivity is common within modules which are run across semesters rather than terms. One of the immediately identifiable areas of change is that of autobiography ... of *At Last Sight* as a project which is driven by my own desires for a work which leads towards catharsis for the artist.

If at the start of the module my intentions were geared towards the performative articulation of 'truth', of selected aspects of my own history given voice through the mouths and movements of others, then that desire has been diluted by the group's emerging 'ownership' of the work. This is appropriate, in that the process of making the work is itself now some four months old, and that is without taking the process of writing the text of *At Last Sight* into consideration. Accordingly, a high degree of that which we can call catharsis has already been achieved.

The group has two new performers, Anke Sauthof, a full-time Level One student in the Drama Department, and Laurent Ruggeri, a French exchange student who is enrolled at Chester until June 1999. I offer here an explanation as to why, and how, the group has been enlarged, in the hope that in writing thus something of the ongoing 'openness' of the work may emerge.

**14-1-99**

Anke Sauthof featured in a practical presentation for a Level One module, which I attended in this instance in my capacity as a second marker. During the presentation Anke spoke in German. I asked her afterwards if she would be interested in helping one of the cast, Chris Roberts, with some German translation



- there is a section of the work now (it does not appear in the first text) where Chris describes, in German, a film by the director, Rainer Werner Fassbinder. As Anna Garnett speaks some sections of the work in French, I also asked Anke to invite Laurent to a morning's rehearsal. As Anke and Laurent watched the performers, I found myself observing them as much as I was attending to the seven members of the cast. I spoke afterwards about this, to the original cast in the first instance, in private. I explained that the device of having the 'on-stage' activity framed by a man and a woman who were in no way referred to by the 'cast' opened the work up to a series of readings which were at once wider and more compelling than before. The group members had also been aware of this and, although there was a degree of hesitancy over the issue of adding a new dimension to the piece at such a relatively late stage, there was a unanimous feeling that Anke and Laurent should be invited to participate in the project.<sup>38</sup>

The inclusion of native French and German speakers gives me a number of opportunities, although these break down into two choices ... choices which will doubtless fragment into less obviously exclusive areas. Initially then, I can either opt for a fluency in the delivery of sections in 'foreign' languages, or I can decide to leave mute the two members of the group best able to communicate verbally with the audience. In Liege, the audience will be of predominantly French, Flemish, English or German origin. If this idea seems perverse, it is only in keeping with a performance wherein lies are offered up as truth and *vice versa*. As yet – and this is the project's sole consistency - I am unsure as to the ways in which these two new roles will develop.

I have asked Sarah Skelton to 'speak' her sections of text in sign language. This stemmed from an overheard conversation between Sarah and Elizabeth Hague, where Sarah happened to mention the fact that she is reasonably familiar with sign. I asked her to attempt a run-through using only her hands to communicate and I was surprised to see how effective it seemed ... although I am not sure what I mean by 'effective' when I do not really know much at all about the 'effect' I am seeking to achieve. There is a worry here. I have arrived at that point, familiar to all who have directed work for performance (and perhaps to anybody involved in the creation of art-product, regardless of genre) where I can no longer 'see' the work other than in relation to previous rehearsals. Nothing plays as new anymore, precisely because we are at the stage where rehearsals have shifted, both inevitably and inexorably, from a process of creation to one of repetition. It may be the case that I am embracing and subsequently adopting this 'new idea' simply by dint of its newness. Watching it on a run-through worked for me, but I have long ago lost, if ever I had it at all, the ability to see the work through unfamiliar eyes. Accordingly, the perspective from which I watch is not compatible with that of a member of an audience coming fresh to the work.

**16-1-98**

If I am unable to regard the work with anything approximating to an 'outside eye' then I am no longer sure of my role. This feeling of increasing redundancy at precisely those moments when my knowledge of the work should (?) make me most necessary and useful is not a new one. I have experienced similar states whilst working on previous projects; however, in the past I have always seemed able to draw on something which provided me with a location from which to stand outside and view the work. Here, because I am working in a way which is new to me, I



have no responses to trust other than my own. For example, the issue of lies and truth, which could be said to have initially prompted the work, is one which I am coming to with no theatrical experiences to draw from. In effect, the 'rules' of the performance are being drawn up alongside the piece and I have no way, other than by a series of estimations, of knowing the extent to which the choices I am making will hold good.

This feeling is a tacit recognition of the ways in which the making of *At Last Sight* has been approached. I have utilised a way of working which has allowed me to 'improvise' throughout the process. What is *not* meant here is improvisation in terms either of the Mike Leigh approach or of that made widespread by the publication of Keith Johnstone's 1981 book, *Impro*.<sup>39</sup> Rather, it is an approach towards directing which has allowed for the consideration of any and all interventions and shifts in emphases during the work's construction. This has been characterised as another kind of control towards the achieving of relevant form and not as a wilful and arbitrary procedure.

**20-1-99**

Relevance is measured from two points of view. Firstly, in as far as it fulfils my own acknowledged need not to work from a pre-determined plan but to create 'intuitively' throughout the making of the performance piece, and secondly, to be able to effectively communicate this approach in written form. In these ways, we can say that the practical aspect of the research work undertaken is experimental, in as far as intuitions are tested out and remoulded in relationship to those tests (which is, in fact, the very stuff of rehearsal) in order to create appropriate solutions for performance. It is comparative as well as theoretical inasmuch as

certain observations are made and conclusions are reached (as a consequence of these comparisons) about the nature of performance practice within the work of one individual practitioner (myself) and how this may subsequently be read as a valid part of the practice as a whole.

Therefore, certain conditions which remained - or sought to remain - constant throughout the research have proven themselves too slippery, elusive and restrictive to maintain. Two examples serve to establish this point. Initially, for instance, and notwithstanding notions of heuristic methodologies, the research was intended to remain predominantly retrospective. The retrospection was intended to function inasmuch as I was operating, at the time, with the thought that this would avoid the situation wherein the creative work undertaken would be pre-emptively sullied by analytical concerns. It is also true (and it makes an obvious connection) that an early and unsustainable distinction was made between the activity of making and that of reflecting upon that making. These two issues were clearly interrelated and interdependent, but nonetheless were believed to have their own unique identities. What has *actually* happened is that the research has managed to become intertwined with the practice. There is no distinction: the process of thinking and writing, talking and doing feeds off itself without, as yet, any sign of exhaustion.

Not only has it emerged that it is impossible for solitary reflection on one rehearsal to do anything other than inform work on the next, it has, with the benefit of hindsight, become crucial that it this cyclical pattern is encouraged, given space and licence to evolve.



23-1-99

Because research within the practice of performance, of practice as research, is a relatively new discipline, it has been necessary during this last year, to develop an effective means of carrying out the analysis needed to document the work. These means have borrowed, at least in part, from observations of non-theatre based disciplines.<sup>40</sup> Notwithstanding its scarcity within the field of performance, the relevance of using an individual's own practice as a means towards an understanding of how artists work is not in itself new. It may, indeed, be the only way for an artist to examine the situation of the making of practice. For how else can the observer know more than he or she observes? Clark Moustakis found this to be the case in his study of loneliness *as a subject*, precisely within his own situation as the lonely subject,<sup>41</sup> in much the same way that Igor Stravinsky's series of published lectures, *Poetics of Music*, contains the following progressive disclaimer

What I intend to say to you will not constitute an impersonal exposition of general data, but will be an exploration of music as I conceive it. Nor will this explanation be any less objective for being the fruit of my own experience and personal observations.<sup>42</sup>

Stravinsky continues by saying that because he tests his observations through his own experiences, he is not offering opinions so much as findings, which, accordingly, are as valid for him as any others. Stravinsky's observations are echoed by the artist, David Smith, who writes

I make no attempt to generalise dispassionately. My statements are coloured and prejudiced by my own concepts and experiences.<sup>43</sup>

We could say that whereas music, as Stravinsky's paradigm, occurs through and organises time, David Smith's sculptures exist in space, organising that space through material and process. As a hybrid form, performance can be seen to function at the interface between sound and object, between time and space, duration and location. Something of the difficulties of the two extremes are there, just as much of the licence enjoyed by each form is present in the ephemerality of live performance. I write this because the work that *At Last Sight* is 'becoming' is starting to 'feel' like it should be an installation. The fact remains, if only by dint of its inclusion at a festival of theatre and in a traditional theatre space, that the work will resist this pull, remaining a piece of work which moves through time whilst staying firmly rooted on the theatrical stage.

**24-1-99**

However, I will speak, if only very briefly, about why the pull towards installation is a strong one. Firstly, we know that theatre deals with metaphorical space: the stage masquerades as a drawing room, a battlefield, a palace; just as the theatre lights are signifiers of (an)other time, atmosphere and location. In short, the theatrical space seeks (usually) to invest its on-stage world with values and features of elsewhere. Even when the work is an overt reaction against naturalism, we are still likely to witness the invocation of 'other'. Peter Brook takes us, or at least our *minds*, to Arjuna's chambers. Bertolt Brecht takes us to Arturo Ui's dressing room; Steven Berkoff to a mythical East End of London out of Sophocles' Thebes. Installation, on the other hand, tends to utilise its own *actual* space, drawing on both the historical/cultural *ambience* of the location and its concrete physicality. In this, there exists a type of 'truth' in installation. A truth that is more or less denied to theatre. For whereas an installation can move



towards the highly theatrical a theatre piece is hemmed in by its own artifice ... the truth can go on to lie, but the lie can never then tell truth.<sup>44</sup>

There is another, less philosophical and more pragmatic reason why the notion of developing *At Last Sight* into a work of installation is so tempting. Theatre requires and 'feeds off' variations in pace, rhythm, mood and meaning, amongst a host of other phenomena. The spectator is taken on a journey by the creator(s) of the theatrical product. The nature of *At Last Sight* is that it has developed its own somnambulistic pace ... its inner energies are overtly contemplative rather than dynamic. Re-working, or developing the piece into an installation would allow for the continuance of a lethargic pace inasmuch as differences in the receptive experience of the work would be determined by the spectators' activity of moving physically from one space to the next. The idea of turning a theatre into a gallery, at least in terms of experience and temporary function, is tempting, although I am aware that the festival organisers in Liege are strongly inclined towards the presentation of product which is formulaic in its use of space.

**25-1-99**

*At Last Sight* will maintain its theatrical essence, which is not the same as saying that the emerging interest in subversion *via* installation is something which cannot impact on the work. If nothing else has been learned by this stage it is that we cannot delete from the mind, and that *all* thoughts and ideas of the performance will inform the performance in one way or another. Indeed, we could say that the chief value of this thesis is that it is seeking to trace and document these very changes of mind as and when they occur. Any awkwardness in the reading, therefore, is a mirroring of this process of making.

26-1-99

This is research on my own processes. It has excluded other approaches and is not concerned with the making of comparisons between my own and the practice of others. The research of performance practice does not lend itself to statistical averages, as the practice is designed uniquely in each case. One of the guiding principles of the research, and it is one which has remained throughout, is the notion of appropriateness. Of research which is not carried out primarily for its own sake, but for the development of research itself, of a *way* of researching, which is relevant to the wider practice and understanding of performance. This implies that the research will be at once unique - different to that which might be carried out by somebody else, elsewhere, looking at different work - at the same time as it is capable of dissemination amongst my colleagues and peers.

A reading of 'explanatory' works from artists practising across a range of media suggests that the use of aesthetics or any kind of theory is ascribed a differing value *at the time of creation* depending upon the working practices of the artist. A feature of much postmodern work, for example, is the relationship *with* theory *through* practice.<sup>45</sup> With a number of other approaches, although theory is clearly regarded as having a valuable role to play in post-creation analysis, it is not always deemed useful *in creation*.<sup>46</sup> As Claude Debussy was wont to say, 'theories do not make works of art';<sup>47</sup> and Picasso, famously, refuted all notions that his art product was driven in any way by a theoretically motivated mind.<sup>48</sup> My own experiences, however, suggest a broadly postmodern line; which is not the same thing as stating that my work on *At Last Sight* amounts to the creation of a set of rules or code of



practice which would be true for all practitioners and for all time. The subject of theatre may be taught in this way, but it is seldom practised like it.

What is meant here is that the theatricalisation of theory has become a feature of my theoretical reflection on theatre. During the early stages of this project, my own process of working might, with hindsight, have been described as lateral rather than linear. I was seeking to address a number of aspects of constructing the discrete elements of performance in order that they might be later brought together into one final 'whole'. In later months, as the work developed, these processes evolved into a procedure wherein each of the processes was combined.

Autohistoriography of the writer

Autohistoriography of the performers

Information structure/fictional narrative

Actions (performer *is*)

Re-enactions (performer *as*)

Lies

Truth

Causality

Dialogue

= *At Last Sight*

Description

Determination

Accident

Consequence

Originality

Quotation

Space

4-2-99

The path of inquiry to this point has by no means been in a straight line. Rather, it has been comprised of a series of exploratory meanderings by means of which I have acquired valuable experiences - and continue so to do - as well as gaining an increased understanding of my own artistic personality during the process of making a work of performance. 'Artistic personality' may be at once the clumsiest

and most pretension-laden of terms, but it is offered here as one which seeks to encompass something of the distinction between the 'I' of everyday activity and the 'I' as observed during the making of art. The edges are blurred and indistinct, and ideas of art 'intrude' at times when the mind is at its least expectant or inviting.

**7-2-99**

The fact that the inquiry has not followed a straight line has been a consequence of my undertaking of rehearsal as a process of creation rather than repetition. This has brought with it a rejection of certain lines of inquiry alongside the picking up of new ones, and dealing with these rejections and attractions will form much of the content of subsequent chapters. Relatively early changes were apparent in my rejection, or my move away from, initial ideas about autobiography, in favour of a more complex negotiation of truth and lies within an equally complex written frame. A new language was beginning to evolve which brought with it a dialogue between myself and the problems that I had created, both for myself and for the group - and, by wider implication, for any spectators of the work.

**11-2-99**

Where choices have been made, they are not offered here as solutions for every practitioner working on every project. My earlier comments sought to distance myself from such a claim (or charge) and I can only reiterate that to suggest a series of all-encompassing answers would be misleading in terms of understanding the practice of making performance. That which is documented in the pages of this thesis is no more or less than an articulation of the individual choices which have come to function as elements within a composed and evolving structure, which *this* practitioner has formed for *this* project. What is chosen is up to the individual, but



those choices are controlled by the language and assumptions which every practitioner holds in relation to the practice they are undertaking.

19-2-99

The performance in Liege is only days away. *At Last Sight* is more or less ready. By 'ready' I mean that the work seems to be possessed of a structure which will merit the attention of its spectators. I have written a programme sheet, translated into German and French in addition to the English original, and have arrived at a running order of events, or 'scenes', although the existence of any sort of ordering of events is emphatically denied by the programme (Appendix 5). The spoken text at this stage is included here as Appendix 6, along with the 'original' *At Last Sight*. The performative structure of the work now reads in the following way.

The performers are already located within the performance space as the audience enters. The performers are drinking, smoking and chatting to each other. They in no way ignore the presence of the spectators. The space itself bears traces of previous (and fictional) presentations of the work. A series of chalked lines on the floor, smudged and drawn over; overturned chairs, a battered leather suitcase, a basin of water and an unmade bed; an upstage flat, with a number of Polaroid photographs pinned to it; full and empty bottles of wine on the floor. The performers are removing these 'traces' during the opening few moments as the spectators find their seats. At a given moment, the cast members remove their shoes: the men are dressed in dark suits, the women in blue jeans and white shirts. Glenn Robertson alters the lights from an onstage board, taking down the house lights and bringing up a cold blue wash. Sarah Skelton explains to the audience that she will 'speak' in sign language for much of the performance. The bed is moved



and its new position is marked with chalk. Chris Roberts speaks an introduction into a microphone, claiming that the work is his own story. Glenn Robertson refutes this, claiming the events to be personal to him, Sarah Robertson asks the spectators to attend to her rather than any others. Sarah Skelton is placed on the bed and a chalk outline is drawn around her body. Laurent Ruggeri and Anke Sauthof 'frame' the on-stage activity without ever becoming a part of it.

Sarah Robertson speaks her 'Betrayal' text, which leads into Andrew Proudfoot's words relating to the diary, the unprocessed film, the vial of seawater and the playing cards. Elizabeth Hague tells the audience that the work is somehow akin to the Italian word *pentimento*, in that it suggests both the opportunity for a second seeing and a bleeding through of the once-hidden past. Anna Garnett questions the origins of the diary. Chris Roberts touches Sarah Skelton in a manner which suggests that he is taking personal liberties with her within the safe context of performance. Sarah Skelton tells us that all of his words have been spoken before. 'These are the facts', she says 'and this: this is the story.'

A crime-scene, perhaps a murder-scene is established; a Polaroid photograph of a woman lying on the bed is taken and pinned to the flat. Chris Roberts moves into the audience, identifying two spectators as characters in a film by Werner Rainer Fassbinder. Sarah Skelton moves suddenly, altering the perspective of the set. Andrew Proudfoot stops her, plies her with glasses of wine and asks her to remember their own past experiences: a hotel room slept in, the colour of the walls. Sarah Robertson pushes Andrew, calling him by his name and telling him that he's too close. Elizabeth Hague likens it all to a scene in an invented film by



David Lynch. The women collapse to the floor and the men arrange themselves in pornographic positions on the bed. Sarah Robertson takes a photograph of them. Two sections of recorded sound are played: one is of American actors, a male and a female, from the Hal Hartley film *Simple Men*, the other is of two Japanese actresses from his film *Flirt*. Andrew touches Anna's body. The men remove sections of her shirt, secreting them in pockets, a forensics bag and the suitcase. Glenn and Elizabeth play out a meeting between two characters who choose to call each other by fictitious names; Sarah Skelton and Anna Garnett describe the action over a microphone. Andrew is subjected to an interrogation by the rest of the cast; wine is thrown over him, his head is held under the bowl of water.

Anna lies on the bed and speaks some words in French. Chris Roberts describes a scene from an unmade Fassbinder film, a pornographic film. Chris describes himself and Andrew as identical twins. Andrew and Anna play out a scene where she dresses in his clothes and leaves him. Glenn returns her to the room. Sarah Skelton speaks some lines from *The Liberated Orgasm*. The bed is moved and a scene is played out between Glenn, Chris, Andrew, Sarah Skelton, Sarah Robertson and Elizabeth Hague: they kiss and switch partners. They consume alcohol rapidly. Anna sits up and tells the spectators that she is about to move her lips in synchronisation to a recorded song. She does this, as Andrew and Glenn dismantle the set around her. Andrew and Glenn leave the constructed set, and Chris attempts to manipulate the remaining women into characters from another Fassbinder film. They refuse to move, until, whispering lines from the original text, they vacate the space slowly. Chris continues to describe the Fassbinder scene as the lights are taken down by Andrew.

20-2-99

The question of how this structure has been reached is complex; it amounts to a blend of detailed planning, desperation, intuition, theory and theatricality that denies any intricate form of documentation. To document in detail the reasons behind every performative decision and the ways in which those decisions were translated into actions would be a literally endless task. What I can do, is offer my own reading of *At Last Sight*, as it now stands, and in so doing make an attempt at rationalising some of the choices made. In this, I am, whether by instinct or design, highlighting those choices which I have come to regard as 'key'.

21-2-99

The opening image bearing the traces of previous performances is intended to signal to spectators the idea that the work is cyclical, that the performers' personas are somehow locked into an endless repetition of the actions about to be presented. It is an obvious illusion, and as such, is dissimilar, at least in degree, to some of the less easily discernible lies to follow. It feels like a hedging of too many bets to write now about my 'ideal spectator'. To suggest ways in which I would most like *At Last Sight* to be read, having written so many words throughout this thesis about both the practical and ethical difficulties of imposing meaning on those who receive the work, would be both contradictory and unhelpful. Notwithstanding this, it would be dishonest of me to state that the work, and not least the opening scene, is not designed to communicate a number of features which I regard as vital to the success of the piece.

There are issues at work here such as the identities of the performers. They are dressed in clothes which function overtly as 'costume': the men in similar though



not identical suits, the women in blue jeans and white shirts. At the same time as the clothes are, in themselves, commonplace, the consistency denies any suggestion of the accidental or the 'everyday'. There is the possibility here of a confused or collapsed identity, of a sort of team which exists without a precise uniformity. Spectators are being asked to assume that the three male performers are manifestations of the same persona in the same way that the four females are also functioning as 'one' woman. The males are referred to here as 'three' and the females as 'four'. This is because Laurent Ruggeri and Anke Sauthof (inasmuch as they are kept separate and isolated from the action, at the same time as they are costumed in a similar way to the seven students being assessed) function as less fragmented aspects of the couple to whom the information structure of *At Last Sight* refers. Although it is unlikely that any of the spectators would pick up on this at this very early stage.

The performers are consuming wine and some are smoking cigarettes. Two functions are in operation here. On one level, the alcohol and tobacco are acting as sedatives, calming the cast's nerves. On another, it creates an early indication of the idea of having an off-stage attitude whilst still plainly and deliberately on view: of presenting that which appears to be no more or less than a group of young people waiting for a performance to commence ... which is what they are. Eye contact between performers and spectators is easily made and held, although the cast members are free to look away at will. There is none of the pulling of focus which is common to performances where the audience are regarded as invisible to the cast. The items of furniture, the chairs, the bed and the wash basin, are presented as simple, functional objects. There is the appearance here of a random

nature to their placing, alongside a (seeming) casualness in the ways in which the performers move the objects from place to place, which indicates a deliberate unwillingness to foreground the differing aesthetic qualities of the seven wooden chairs.

This is at once both accurate and imprecise. The set has been designed, and all of its elements have been selected. There is nothing seen that has not been either deliberately placed or left exposed. However, within these parameters of design the students are free to improvise. An overturned chair is set upright in an approximate place, just as the bed is only ever roughly where I want (and expect) it to be.

The chalk lines suggest a number of things. Impermanence, in that the earlier lines are no longer clear ... the nature of chalk is that its lines are fleeting. There is an absence of illusion, brought about by the choosing of indicated lines rather than solid walls; and a feeling of police forensics ... to be made overt when the 'body' of the woman is outlined in chalk.

**22-2-99**

The set is not without its own aesthetic quality. It is functional, inasmuch as nothing is there which is not used, but it is also possessed of much that is visually pleasing. The dimensions feel right. The space remains open behind the set, allowing the spectator to see that the set is no more important than the space around it. This contributes to the overall sense of artifice and construction that has been a constant feature of rehearsals. The set is thus seen (or designed to be seen) as an integral aspect of the performance, rather than the dressed space in which the performance occurs. In this it is a development of my interest in installation. The



set is a metaphorical space in that it is designed to look like 'somewhere else', but it is an actual space in that it foregrounds its own striving for the status of other. There are no particularly special lighting effects, no clothes which are designed to catch the light or engender spectatorial awe for the *costumier*'s art.

23-2-99

The discipline of *At Last Sight* is not to be found in the creation of 'beautiful moments' so much as in a resistance to that very temptation. And beauty does indeed offer a tempting path to pursue: the slowly fading light, the *chiaroscuro* of the only half revealed, the ubiquity of the swirling mist. It all seems too easy, too pat, which in itself may not be good enough reason to resist. But if all that beauty will permit is the guarantee of at least a partial approval from the spectators – something along the lines of "I didn't like it very much, but I thought the set was gorgeous" – then beauty is a place I do not want to go. I do not know the extent to which this attitude stems from pride or perversity. I certainly do not want to deny 'beautiful moments' through some high-handed disregard of aesthetics. Like most people, I would rather look at a flower than a weed. Perhaps the nearest analogy is to speak of a weed. If that is the chosen subject then I have no wish to depict it as other than it is. I have no wish to light it in such a way that it gives the illusion of being a flower. So, the opening of *At Last Sight* eschews a striving for that which might be termed as 'false beauty'. Because the audience in Liege will be made up of those who are relatively experienced in making and seeing theatre, I trust that they will recognise this absence as a choice rather than an unknowing disregard.

In discussing beauty, I need also to mention the cast. The students are presenting themselves to be seen and as such are subject to the same aesthetic concerns as the set. This does not mean that I shall be discussing the levels of attractiveness as they apply to each member of the group. The photographs provided within this thesis afford readers the opportunity to make their own judgements. What I can say is that the youth of the group is important. On one level, they seem too young to convey the narrative sense of *At Last Sight* with any conviction. The greater their conviction in rehearsals, the greater the gulf between their obvious youth and the more middle aged melancholia of the material. This does not alter the fact that to observe them moving in the space is pleasing. This is so not because they are more or less attractive than other performers of their age, but because the world of *At Last Sight* is so at odds with the world of the group. Their 'beauty' then (if youth is a type of beauty in itself) provides a counterpoint to the darkness of the themes. Their unadorned beauty is fetishised by the improbability of people so young having seen so much. *At Last Sight* is revealed in this way as a mourning for the very youth that the performers so innocently embody.<sup>49</sup>

When Sarah Skelton speaks to the audience, saying the following, she is creating a further tension between the 'real' and the staged, at the same time as she is foregrounding herself as a subject to be seen

Good evening. My name is Sarah. Sarah Skelton. I'm twenty years old. A little nervous, a little bit scared. I'm going to be speaking for much of the next hour in sign language. I can speak. It's just a theatrical device. A way of making words visual without inventing action.



The utilisation of sign language is an invitation to the audience not only to look at Sarah but also to read her actions as decorative rather than functional. The sign language *caveat* indicates right from the outset that this is not going to be an illusionistic performance. Not only will there be very little by way of 'sleight of hand', but any moments approaching this state will be exposed. There is to be no hiding here behind a false theatricality. That seems to be at once the nub and the paradox of the piece, or at least of the interests which have driven me to this point. For if I am indeed interested, as I was at the start of this process, in the presentation of some kind of discernible 'truth', then theatre would appear to be an unsuitable medium in which to work. Theatre, after all, uses the words 'honesty', 'integrity' and 'truth' relentlessly whilst at the same time trading in falsehood. With fine art - and I am thinking here of work which traces a route from Carl Andre and Jeff Koons back to Kurt Schwitters and Marcel Duchamp - the object is the *object* itself in the first instance and is something *other* only by reference or inference. In theatre, the performer is most regularly regarded as referring to *other* in the first instance and the *self* only when that self is pushed to the fore. The telling of lies to the spectators about the students' relationships with each other is one way of focusing attention on the selves of the performers.

The spectators are informed that all wine consumed in the performance is genuinely alcoholic. In fact, there will be four bottles of non-alcoholic grape juice, decanted into bottles and placed amongst the ten containing standard red or white wine. Because a number of bottles are being opened with corkscrews as the audience enters the space I am assuming that all of the bottles will be regarded as not tampered with and 'real'. This does two things. It introduces, or adds to, the

idea that unplanned for things may happen, that the performers themselves are not going to be entirely in control of the events to come and that directorial control is being surrendered to chance. It also creates an attention on the 'real'.

**24-2-99**

On one level, the barrier between watcher and watched is broken down by the performers relating directly to and with members of the audience. There are three things that this can achieve.

- 1: It can create intimacy.
- 2: It can create embarrassment.
- 3: It can subvert the notion of the spectator as a darkened and unseen observer.

**25-2-99**

I want the intimacy without the embarrassment, and am hoping that none of the spectators are made to feel awkward by the performers' returning of their gaze. As ever with performance, one only ever really sees the work when it is presented to an audience. As a director, it is difficult to gauge with any accuracy the ways in which an audience will respond. It is, in many ways, the central challenge of directing performance: to make the work one's own at the same time as it is given away. Performing *At Last Sight* only once in Liege means that the piece cannot be reconfigured in-situ as it were, with revisions made on the days following evening performances. The next presentation after Liege will be at University College Chester, where the spectators have an existing knowledge of and relationship with the cast. What this means is that the members of the cast will have to make immediate assessments of the spectatorial response in Liege and then adjust their performances accordingly. I, personally, will have no opportunity to make changes. This is not to make an assumption that the work will *need* to be altered in any way,



so much as it is a recognition that all work presented to an audience is always a form of work in progress.

There are sections of the performance, particularly between Elizabeth Hague and Glenn Robertson and Anna Garnett and Andrew Proudfoot respectively, where the action is overtly filmic. The sections of text spoken here are played as dialogue rather than description. The performing here is broadly naturalistic. This is intended to create a fusion of empathy and distance, so that at precisely those moments when the spectators are being invited into the work *via* a recognisable and consistent style there is also an exaggerated feeling of falseness. The 'acting' is no more or less than that and the empathetic nature of the playing is undercut. The theatrical naturalism reads as false by dint of the naturalness of all that surrounds it. It is important to me that these scenes are delivered in this way. If little of my own experienced narrative remains in *At Last Sight* then at least an idea of love as something which is in many ways formulaic and already always rehearsed still exists.

The fact that the two scenes are concerned with a meeting and a separation is intended to both frame the relationship and exemplify the idea of influence. The courtship and the parting are seen almost as rites of passage, of behaviour which is so modified by on-screen influences as to have become quasi-ritualistic. Relationships become then quotations of previous relationships ... one's own and others, which have been experienced by proxy. In this way, *At Last Sight* functions as an indication of relationships *per se* at the same time as its information structure, its content, deals with the specifics of my own relationships.

Ultimately, my own directorial and writerly intentions will be mediated by the responses of the work's spectators. We know well enough, as this thesis has already stated, that the act of presentation will always convey more than it intends, and that the very idea of the interpretation of performance is as complex a form of communication as one could possibly enter into.<sup>50</sup> *At Last Sight* is moving here from one set of complexities into another.

**27-2-99**

Reading and writing the experience of seeing *At Last Sight* in the company of others, and of taking the work forwards out of that, is the place this thesis now moves towards.



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<sup>1</sup> The Department of Drama at University College Chester has a full-time staff of seven lecturers and one full-time technician. No part-time members of staff direct assessed student productions.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 4.

<sup>3</sup> For an indication of this commencement point, see examples of correspondence between my supervisor and myself in Appendix 5.

<sup>4</sup> By 'popular' I mean that the productions sold out on every night that they played.

Notwithstanding the fact that the bulk of any audience for curriculum-driven work is invariably made up of students in the department, work that is difficult to read finds it hard to draw a crowd at Chester. *Mojo and Road* made no particular demands on their audience; the work had a 'feel good' quality and it was this, I suspect, that resulted in the ticket sales.

<sup>5</sup> In this, my approach to making work is antithetical to Elizabeth Lecompte's processes with the Wooster Group, where she urges the performers on to greater speed whenever she gets bored with rehearsals. See Savran, D. *Breaking the Rules: The Wooster Group*. UMI Research Press, Michigan, 1986.

<sup>6</sup> Clark Moustakis' contribution to the field of heuristic research methodology is considerable, and his writings have informed this thesis no less than they have impacted on lecturing undertaken by this writer at University College Chester. In addition to Moustakis' paper in J. F.T. Bugental's *Challenges of Humanistic Psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967, other influential works read in the period leading up to the undertaking of *this* particular research project include Moustakis, C. *Loneliness*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1961 and Moustakis, C. *Loneliness and Love*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972. The three texts, taken together, will provide any reader of this thesis with a thorough overview of heuristic research processes and will articulate and contextualise the area in ways which this writer cannot hope to match.

<sup>7</sup> A consequence of this is that I feel I need to provide clues as to the potential shape of the work when I would rather let the project evolve in its own way. It is at this point that I am beginning to recall some of the negative aspects of working with a group. The fact that they care enough about the work to care about the way that it will (probably) be made is reassuring, but their collective need to know is out of sync with my own.

<sup>8</sup> Despite being strongly advised by the head of department not to enter into any canvassing of students for specific projects, students have been 'targeted' by staff on more than one occasion.

<sup>9</sup> Reinelt, J & Roach, J. *Critical Theory and Performance*. Michigan University Press., 1992

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 109.

<sup>11</sup> Pierce, C. S. *Writings on Semiotics*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill & London, 1991. pp. 47-54

<sup>12</sup> Lechte, L. *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers*. Routledge, London and New York, 1994. p. 150.

<sup>13</sup> See Pierce (1991).

<sup>14</sup> Derrida, J. *Structure, Sign and Play*. University of Chicago Press, 1978. p. 289.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* p. 111

<sup>16</sup> Martin, J. *Voice in Modern Theatre*. Routledge, London, 1991. p.119.

<sup>17</sup> For an analysis of the ways in which the two approaches differ and overlap see Sarup, M. *Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*. Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hertfordshire, 1993.

<sup>18</sup> I am using 'we' here as a reference to spectators, critics and readers of this thesis, rather than the 'we' of the *At Last Sight* group. In fact, I am not convinced at this stage of the project that the members of the group share these views at all. That it will comprise a way of working does not mean that it will create a way of thinking.

<sup>19</sup> Simms, S. *Postmodern Thought*. Icon Books, 1998. p. 95.

<sup>20</sup> Lechte, L, 1994. p. 234.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p. 235.

<sup>22</sup> Douglass, B and Moustakis, C. 'Heuristic Inquiry: The internal search to know. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*. Vol. 25(3). 1993. pp. 39-40.

<sup>23</sup> Barthes, R. *Camera Lucida*. Vintage Books, 1982.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* P. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Reinelt & Roach, 1992. p. 354.



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<sup>26</sup> Production work feeds into one's teaching, just as teaching feeds into subsequent productions. The relationship is, in my experience, rich and rewarding. What distinguishes the approach being taken with *At Last Sight* is that the processes are being made subject to analysis, which is both immediate and reflective. Connections that might otherwise be made casually are, in this case, demands I am making on myself.

<sup>27</sup> States, B in Reinelt & Roach, 1992. p. 371.

<sup>28</sup> November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1998.

<sup>29</sup> For an appraisal of directing within a variety of educational spheres see Rae, K. *A Better Direction*. Gulbenkian Press, London, 1991.

<sup>30</sup> I know this from my experience of directing Chris Roberts in a production of *Road*, and this has been confirmed in rehearsals on *At Last Sight*.

<sup>31</sup> There are many texts available which deal with naturalistic performance, both as technique and movement. As useful as any is *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice 1: Realism and Naturalism*. Styan, J.L, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

<sup>32</sup> As a non-vocational programme of study there are no provisions for specialist voice classes as University College Chester.

<sup>33</sup> Rae (1991)

<sup>34</sup> These performative modes seem to cover all of the choices we have at our disposal. There may be more than the six I name, but I am not aware of them. At this stage, I am encouraging the cast to look more closely at the descriptive and the actual, rather than dropping 'naturally' into imitation and expression. The students at Chester have been influenced too heavily by the maxim 'don't tell me, show me', and they are uncomfortable at this stage with verbal description in lieu of imitative action. I am not arguing the students into a new hierarchy here, so much as asking them to recognise that the conventions they have been working through previously are themselves subject to hierarchical imposition.

<sup>35</sup> Glenn Robertson works evenings and weekends in the university bar, as well as captaining the football team, which necessitates attendance at two weekly training sessions and competitive midweek matches; Sarah Skelton works at a retail outlet in Chester ... the hours are erratic, often covering full Saturdays and Sundays; Chris Roberts works for Virgin Cinemas ... this is shift work, often taking place at precisely those times when a group would normally rehearse outside the usual hours of study; Liz Hague is a paid swimming instructor, running children's classes on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. These circumstances, which are increasingly common to students in higher education, taken alongside their commitments to other modules and their need for a degree of genuine leisure time mean that the opportunities available for group-rehearsal are limited.

<sup>36</sup> Some members of the group feel that we are spending too much time talking and not enough doing. They feel, understandably according to their experiences of other projects, that an understanding of why they are working the way that they are is no substitute for rehearsal. Chief among the students feeling this way is Anna Garnett, but she is not alone. It is not a question of mutiny ... the group is still working well, but they are concerned that their marks for performance will be compromised by a reduction in the hours they feel we should be spending learning lines and blocking movements. I can understand their concerns ... although I do not share them.

<sup>37</sup> See Oddey (1997).

<sup>38</sup> We made this decision without ever having seen Laurent perform. Anke has been seen by me in the Level 1 presentation, but this comprised no more on her part than standing still and speaking.

<sup>39</sup> Mike Leigh's use of improvisation as a means towards the creation of character and plot has been evidenced most emphatically in his critically acclaimed productions for stage and screen. A critical referencing of his processes can be found in Clements, P. *The Improvised Play: The Work of Mike Leigh*. Methuen, London, 1983.

Issues of improvisation in terms of theatre exercises are contained in Johnstone, K. *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*. Methuen, London, 1981.

<sup>40</sup> Books such as Gordon Graham's *Philosophy of the Arts*. Routledge, London & New York, 1997, cover the work of many artists working in many forms. Performance references are notable through their absence. Graham's work is not alone in this regard. Other than through references



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via Plato and Aristotle, no mention is made of performance in Shepherd's *Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press, 1987) or Cothey's *The Nature of Art* (Routledge, London, 1990). It is as though something of the ephemerality of performance is carried over into analysis of its making. Nothing remains of one and precious little remains of the other.

<sup>41</sup> Moustakis, 1961.

<sup>42</sup> Stravinsky, Igor. *Poetics of Music*, 1970. pp. 7-9

<sup>43</sup> Smith, D. in Gray, 1968. p. 137

<sup>44</sup> Something of the relationship between installation and theatre is explored in *Performance Art Into the 90s*. Hodges, N (Ed.) Art & Design, London, 1994.

<sup>45</sup> See Whitmore, J. *Directing Postmodern Theater* University of Michigan Press, 1994 and Birringer, J. *Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism*. Indiana University Press, 1991.

<sup>46</sup> As the bibliography will reveal, the writings of artists working across a number of disciplines have been considered in the construction of this thesis. Many of these examples have been found in the pages of broad-spectrum publications such as *The Philosophy of Art, an Introduction to Aesthetics* (Graham, G. Routledge, 1997), *The Principles of Art* (Collingwood, R. G. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1938) and *Philosophy Looks at the Arts* (Margolis, J. (ed.) Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1987).

<sup>47</sup> In Graham, G (1997). P.86

<sup>48</sup> *ibid* p. 95

<sup>49</sup> I was born in 1959 and am forty this year.

<sup>50</sup> See Phelan, P. *Unmarked*. Routledge, London & New York, 1991.

## Chapter Three

4-3-99

The writing now is post-Liege. *At Last Sight* was presented in the *Salle Les Chiroux*, Liege, on March 3rd at 7.00 p.m. The spectators numbered three hundred and twelve paying, alongside some sixty performers from other troupes and organisers of the festival who were allowed free admittance. The performance ran for sixty-eight minutes, if we take 'performance' to mean that which occurred between the first overtly 'performed' action and the taking down of the on-stage lights before the cast bowed. However, as has been discussed in previous sections of this thesis, with *At Last Sight* the distinctions between theatrical performance and non-theatricalised activities have been deliberately blurred.

If we measure the performance in terms other than 'acted' action under arranged stage lighting, then *At Last Sight* ran, for certain members of the audience, and excluding time spent following the performance in reflection and discussion, for a maximum of eighty-nine minutes. The performers greeted those who took their seats first, although the manner of the greetings themselves was not noticeably theatricalised. Similarly, a black flat at the rear of the performing space, decorated with the traces of previous rehearsals, including Polaroid photographs (see Appendix 7). In addition to the photographs, torn latex gloves, cigarette ends and fragments of a white cotton shirt, were taped to the board and studied by certain spectators for several minutes after the performers had left the space.



The programmes handed out to spectators appeared to be instrumental in the ways in which the work was read. This is more than mere assumption on my part. Upon returning to the festival base, a youth hostel and performance venue in the centre of the city, the performers were immediately embroiled in a series of conversations. These conversations were primarily with representatives of the groups from the University of New York at Buffalo, Universite de Lille and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. They concerned issues of off-stage 'relationships' within the cast and the ways in which these relationships had been seen to impact on the performance. To a strong core of spectators, the lies contained in the programme were taken at face value. Of the festival participants who spoke with either the students, or myself none seemed to have even the slightest doubt that the information given was anything but true. For myself, this created something of a Catch-22, as I had no real wish to extend this aspect of the fabrication beyond the performance ... it had functioned, to my mind, as a method of extending the performance frame, but it had only done this really as a way in. Consequently, I had a strong inclination to 'come clean' with the truth and rationale behind the misinformation in question as soon as was appropriate. The *At Last Sight* performers, however, were of a completely different mind.

For the cast this was a wonderful and only partly unexpected opportunity to engage in a week long process of 'Invisible Theatre'. To this end, they continued the 'performance' by developing the story of romantic and emotional involvement, to the point where they were manufacturing arguments, 'tiffs' and intimate encounters in front of a number of fellow participants, who had themselves begun to form an unknowing and partly unwilling audience.

8-3-99

There are a series of ethical issues at work here, which I am seeking in a hypocritical way to distance myself from. There is a sense of duplicity here inasmuch as I am raising questions of ethics at the same time as I am claiming to want to divorce both myself and *At Last Sight* from any ethical considerations. In this I am aware that my approach to analysis is on one level consistent with Gay McAuley's

Insiders reporting on their own culture ... raises a very important methodological issue in terms of rehearsal analysis. Should the observation, documentation and analysis of rehearsal process be undertaken by the artists themselves? Is this possible .... Who has the right to tell the tale? Who sees more of what is going on?<sup>1</sup>

This consistency, however, is only temporary. When McAuley develops her argument, suggesting that "there are serious methodological problems for someone who has a major creative involvement with the production also attempting to observe and analyse the whole of the process"<sup>2</sup> I have to disagree. Indeed, this entire thesis comprises a challenge to her claims.

9-3-99

Ethical considerations then *are* an issue within the work at the same time as they *are not* an issue within my analysis. Whereas McAuley's idealised and non-participant observer might be inclined towards a rationalisation of the ethical implications within *At Last Sight* I am not. As McAuley recognises, "documentation of any sort necessarily involves selection and is, therefore, already in itself a form of analysis".<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, my decision to raise an issue and then side step it is an integral part of the documentary process. Having agreed within



the group that any and all aspects of the making and performing process are likely to be used as grist to the mill of the thesis, the ethics of making and reading are taking care of themselves. Where ethics become questionable is in the act of telling lies within a framework which only exists for the tellers. And yet to hesitate at this point would be to deny *At Last Sight* what is becoming its central concern. The stretching of the frame of performance is now *the* defining feature of the work, to the point where I am able to say that the way the work is being made is what the work is about. What more apposite way of dealing with truth and lies than to develop the work itself into a position where lies are themselves read as truths?

This is not to ignore the issue of ethics altogether, as though a refusal to discuss the matter would make it disappear. In fact, the 'problem', such as it is that at all, is connected to ideas of invisible theatre *per se*, rather than to the specifics of *At Last Sight*.<sup>4</sup>

**10-3-99**

At best, I have a cautious cynicism towards invisible theatre; at worst this cynicism threatens to become overpowering. It has always seemed to me that there are enough incidents occurring in the world at large, without actors, be they students or professionals, adding their own inventions to that mass. 'Terrible is the temptation to do well', as Brecht warned us, and that temptation seems never more terrible than when we come to regard performance as some sort of medicine for the masses. As a means of showing people how to live their lives according to our own intrinsically patronising notions of 'good' and 'bad' behaviour.

If that accounts for the cynicism, let me state that the caution comes from the notions of accountability and consequence. If an action takes place within the recognised confines of performance, then, broadly speaking, the propagator of that action is not likely to be held accountable beyond the metaphorical bringing down of the curtain. We accept that the act encountered is a lie and that, as such, it has no direct consequence on or in the outside world. Subsequently, we are able to recognise a dysfunctional form of over-empathy in those instances when - for example, as is the case for certain television soap actors - members of the public loathe or love the actor according to the on-screen activities undertaken and displayed. To this end, I have never been tempted by the ideas which fuel the desire in some to bring theatre into the realm of the real, so much as I have been, and remain, fascinated by the possibilities of bringing the real into the realm of theatre.

Notwithstanding this, it was interesting to observe the ways in which the cast so obviously relished the notion of - at least in public - living out the lies created by and through *At Last Sight*. What was perhaps of most interest was that the absence of any characterisation based on an emotional and psychological rationale, which was a feature of the 'production' of *At Last Sight*, was so fully subverted by the off-stage behaviour of the group. It was as though, having acted as ciphers within the performance, the students were possessed of an eagerness to engage in forms of invisible realism within the elastic parameters of the performative frame. There was both more to it and less than this, of course. On one level, I have no doubts that the group took pleasure in what really amounted to a type of flirtation without consequence. For if the idea of observers as 'audience' imbued the behaviour of the group towards each other with a high degree of consequence, then, conversely,



the students themselves were able to flirt openly (and, it should be said, at times quite outrageously) with impunity. They were thus able to engage in flirtation with an absence of consequence. Their behaviour was legitimised and licensed from both sides: from the spectators' and their own.

In terms of the performance itself, within the space of *Salle Les Chiroux*, *At Last Sight* could be said to have held together well in production terms. By this, I mean that the work had an internal coherence that ensured a correspondingly coherent 'style'. The individual student's endeavours were carried through to a high standard, to the point - and this often seems to be the acid-test of curriculum-driven work - where I was able to observe the group as 'performers', rather than being reminded of their status as students. There is, however, a large 'but' here. The fact that I was pleased with the way in which *At Last Sight* played does not mean that the piece is not also in need of a considerable process of overhaul and revision. The levels of energy within the piece meant that the pace was at times lethargic. The notion of deconstruction was so heavily applied that there was no real sense of what it was that was being deconstructed. Conversely, the ending was too neat ... reading like the stitching together of something hitherto unseen. The space was played with too much width, meaning that performers simply getting into position took up an inordinate amount of time.

Of all of these, this last point is the easiest one to address. In my experience, student performers have a predilection towards moving and then speaking. This is a huge generalisation, which may not match the experience of the reader; however, my own time as a university-sector lecturer (some fifteen years) and also my

experiences of student work at festivals, has shown me that this is very often the case. It is something which often slips past in student rehearsals, probably for no more reason than the fact that these rehearsals often take place in blocks of three hours, be they morning, afternoon or evening. It is usually the case that any full weekends of rehearsal are only used closer to the date of performance, when, effectively, the work is already 'set'. Short rehearsals mean that problems with pace are less readily picked up on. As directors/tutors we see short sections of the work, often with several days in between, and may only recognise a predictability in pace at precisely that time when we tell ourselves the all-too readily acceptable lie that 'all we need now is an audience'.

**11-3-99**

It is at this point, that this thesis, this reading and recording of the practical processes involved in making work for performance, moves into a new direction. Whereas the work of the previous chapters has been reflective only inasmuch as the written words have reflected on performative decisions already made, this chapter has to deal with reflecting on reflection. For it is clear that in the two months between now and the presentation of *At Last Sight* in Chester, when the students are assessed in performance, a number of key changes will need to be made.

As I write these words now, on March 11th, 1999, I am aware that the *actual* time available to work with the group is five weeks. We perform on the week beginning May 24th, but between now and then is a three week period of Easter vacation, followed immediately by two weeks which I will be spending at New York State University as part of a long-term exchange programme between faculty staff at the



two institutions. This means that all of the changes need to be worked through with expediency. An additional challenge to change comes from the positive feelings of the group members regarding the way *At Last Sight* was performed in Liege. There is a strong sense of satisfaction within the group, and deservedly so; which means that change may well be resisted from within. Whilst it is in the nature of the work that our rehearsals remain organic and progressive, rather than repetitive and fixed, it is in the nature of the group, as we have created it, that all of the opinions offered are listened to and respected. Whether this means, as I suspect it does, that I will (simply) attempt to introduce the notion of change as though it is part of a group-decision, remains to be seen.

I am aware of the possibility that I am introducing change primarily (or even purely) as a research device. As something that is done in order to assess the reaction of the students as well as my own ways of dealing with their responses. The reader may wonder whether I am suggesting change for these reasons and that my stated perception of 'artistic concerns' is functioning as a smokescreen. It is a question I am unable to answer with any authority. Certainly, I can discount the idea of change as a research device in any 'pure' sense - and I can say the same thing about the word 'primarily' - but this is not to suggest that any easy dislocating of research strategies *per se* from the subject of the research can exist. My actions and decisions stem from my interests, and my interests are located as firmly within the concerns of the thesis as with the construction of *At Last Sight*. I am not only *unable* to separate the researcher's role from the practitioner's, I am *unwilling* to do so. If, as I have suggested, the way that the work is being made is what the work is about, then the complexity and overlap of my role is central.

What I can hope for is that any decisions stemming from a drive towards research are strengthening rather than diluting the creative product of *At Last Sight*. But even within this hope there is defiance. The work is, after all, a research project. As has been pointed out throughout this thesis, *At Last Sight* was never intended as a process, as an *event*, which would then be made subject to analysis. This remains a key feature of the thesis.

My roles have been complex and overlapping from the moment that this project was conceived. The fact that this complexity is being negotiated *in the here and now* does not add to the initial level of complexity. It only takes it from the private and inarticulate into the public. The first point 'public' is the group.

**16-3-99**

The group met earlier today, now March 16th, for our first rehearsal since returning from Liege. I took this opportunity to discuss with them my feelings about the work, along with some of my ideas as to how *At Last Sight* might be further developed. As I had anticipated, this caused something of a schism in the group, with some members resisting change and others more happily embracing the idea. There is, in fact, an almost even split, although it has to be said that those who are most emphatically opposed to change appear to be so inclined because of pressures of time rather than any strong aesthetically driven disagreement with my proposals. My line of argument, such as has been given, is that we now have the safety net of the 'Liege Version' as a product which we can re-rehearse with relative ease should the revised and reworked production not match up to our expectations. Offered on these terms, it is difficult for individuals within the group



to hold onto their positions of resistance, and it now appears that we will be able to proceed with these modifications with a broad consensus of approval.

We began the process of modification by introducing more elements of narrative. Not in order to give the piece a stronger sense of linear progression, so much as to provide the spectators with more clues as to what it is that is being fragmented. In Liege, *At Last Sight* felt like an ultimately straightforward exercise in deconstruction and on-stage/in-situ *assemblage*, rather than an experiment with form and narrative, truth and lies, experience and invention. The inclusion, therefore, of additional encounters between our 'fictional' man and woman, who have become known now within the text as Arabella and Paris, is intended to bolster the fictional thematics which were always at the core of the origins of *At Last Sight* as a written text. In fact, it is through going back to the original text of *At Last Sight* that these encounters will almost certainly emerge and take shape.

I have no real desire to create a series of new 'moments of business' in order to flesh the work out, when there are a number of sections of the text where the germ, at least, of narrative-enhancing moments already exists. In part, the difficulties we have encountered in animating the work are to be found in its nature. Notwithstanding numerous theatrical precedents in naturalistic or otherwise mainstream practice, it still seems as though a relationship between a man and a woman does not necessarily lend itself to theatrical presentation *of this kind*. The fact that I have no real desire to engage the audience's attention through dialogue - a disagreeably glib form of communication within a piece with pretensions towards postmodernism. And without wishing to intimate, illustrate or otherwise display

sexual intimacy, there are precious few areas of human contact which come readily to my mind. That which is private in practice does not easily adapt itself to the public arena that is performance.

Certainly, there are companies whose work could be regarded as the private made public. DV8 is one such example.<sup>5</sup> However, the physical nature of their work means that imitation is tempered by an exaggerated expressivity. In this sense, *At Last Sight* can be regarded as occupying the spaces between expressivity and imitation. Between abstraction and intimacy. Without expressivity and the imitative, we are left with only four modes of performance: indication, metaphor, description and actuality, and it is to these modes that *At Last Sight* must now look.

Within these self-imposed limitations some options already exist, and these are as follows. Dialogue can be placed at a greater distance from the audience ... and can be utilised in such a way that the potential for empathetic engagement is undercut. The consumption of bottles of wine within the production can be ritualised in some way, in order that, at the same time as the reality of the alcohol is blurring the divide between fiction and fact, the activity of drinking can be used to comment on courtship. And the ordering of those events which currently exist and which we wish to keep can be reconfigured in a way that augurs against a neat conclusion to an otherwise fragmented experience.

Although this may seem like a going back to Square One ... as a peculiar return to a point of beginnings, two thirds of the way through a final academic year, this is



not the case. Telling the students that the version of *At Last Sight* presented in Liege allows us the luxury of change with a minimum of risk was no mere platitude. The work undertaken so far will enable the group to re-create from a position of relative knowing; for just as I, from a directorial perspective, can see areas that would benefit from change, so the students, as performers, are increasingly aware of discernible weaknesses within the piece. The palpable fear of change is not a response to the notion of change itself, so much as to the pressures of time ... to the temptation to settle for 'good enough'.

It is a measure of the group's desire to produce a piece of work which stretches them both academically and creatively that they are willing to suspend these temptations and re-work *At Last Sight* with a renewed vigour. If anything, the 'success' of the performance in Liege has made the group even more determined to work to their utmost.

This notion of 'success' is a vexed one. By what criteria could the work be so considered? By the volume of applause received? By the level and manner of spectatorial discussion? By the feelings of satisfaction inherent in the performers (informed as it undoubtedly is by their collective reading of the response)? By the layers of complexity within the work, over which the group feel they have established a high and surprising degree of control? There are no satisfactory answers. All that I can suggest, with a reasonable impunity, is that the performing students feel a greater sense of satisfaction at this moment in time than do I.

17-3-99

This in itself is a common enough feeling. From a performer's perspective, presenting the work to an audience will often bring with it an attendant sense of satisfaction *via* ownership: in performance the work seems to belong solely to the performer. Individual nuances are introduced, pace alters according to one's reading of the mood of the audience and the hours of rehearsal, of preparation, are brought to a conclusion for the duration of the piece. Speaking from my own experience, I can recognise that in my capacity as a performer within other projects, I have been satisfied with my own contribution to a given production even when or if that production is patently unsatisfactory to an audience. As a director, one has an overview that seeks at least to encompass the work as a whole. This is another reason why the idea of revision at this stage has not been an easy subject to broach: the cast are pleased with their individual contributions, as am I ... and to change *At Last Sight* is to inevitably change something of these sections. It is difficult, therefore, to praise the cast's efforts and accomplishments on the one hand and then be critical on the other. There are members of the group who make fewer attempts at distinguishing between critical commentary and criticism than others, seeing the call for change as little more than a polite form of chastisement.

We elaborated on the process of change by talking through the work, establishing those areas within which the individual students involved felt any sense of particular concern. In this way, we established the following (and in this sequence) as scenes which we might consider replacing or re-working:

**1: A scene between Andrew Proudfoot and Anna Garnett, where she goes to leave, dressing in his jacket and tying back her hair.**



Anna Garnett was unhappy with her own performance in this section and prefers the idea of dropping the scene wholesale rather than going through a process of revision. Sarah Robertson has since indicated a willingness to step in for Anna and she, myself and Andrew will spend some time looking at new ways of reworking both the text and action. With hindsight, I can see that there has always been a lacklustre quality to Anna's work on this scene, which disinclines me now towards any preventative intervention on my part. The way she performed in this section was always credible, but there has always been unwillingness on Anna's part to stretch herself as a performer. She has emerged as the weakest member of the group. She speaks very quietly, and she does so in the only genuine monotone I have ever experienced. A microphone helps, giving her speech volume if not range, but this scene has always been played with the naked voice. Accordingly, I raised no objections when Anna informed the other members of the group and myself of her decision to withdraw from this section.

**2: A scene where Andrew Proudfoot rubs himself against Glenn Robertson's leg, in the manner of a mating dog.**

I like the way this scene worked, but the group felt that it was 'too odd', even within the context of an often illogical-seeming production. I take this to mean that this action contradicted other scenes in a negative way. I had initially wanted the scene in precisely because of its overtly base quality. Where much of the rest of *At Last Sight* is elegiac in tone, this scene was always earthy, offering a glimpse of the profane in the midst of that which might otherwise appear to be pseudo-profundity. It looks now as though the scene will disappear wholesale, rather than being

reworked, as to integrate a contextualising moment or to reduce the lewd nature of the action would be to dilute any potency it may currently possess.

I argued what I considered to be a strong case for retaining the scene, but the dynamics of the group are firmly set against it. Within the structure of *At Last Sight*, I suspect that they are correct in their opinion. There is no sense here of having to sacrifice my own ego, begrudgingly, to that of the group. We have worked this way from the very start and I am comfortable with that process - what is happening here has more to do with sacrificing a 'favourite moment' for the strength of the overall piece. It is a common enough occurrence in the making of theatre, as I suspect is the case with any form of art, but it gets no easier as time goes by. What is happening, in fact, is that at the same time as this teacher/director is becoming confident enough with the act of making work to be able to welcome a free and open exchange of ideas, that confidence is also breeding an arrogance that my own decisions and instincts are more often strong than weak. 'Strong' and 'weak' in this sense function as a less immediately problematic way of saying 'right' rather than 'wrong'.

### **3: A kissing scene between Sarah Robertson and Chris Roberts.**

This began as an exercise in 'staging the real' but has since taken on a rather gratuitous feel. Not least because there is evidence of a strong physical and emotional attraction between the two students. Nothing has been said - at least to me - by any of the group, but a perceptible feeling of voyeurism has descended whenever these two work through this scene. This in itself offers a curious element of role-reversal, as the scene was initially created in order to suggest voyeurism to



the spectators. As long as Sarah and Chris were ‘acting’ the kiss, no matter how seemingly authentically, we in the group were happy to watch it; now that we feel it may be driven by desire we are distinctly uncomfortable. I say ‘we’ with a degree of authority, and notwithstanding the absence of any hard information, as the evidence of my own eyes tell me how awkward others in the group are feeling. There is a palpable discomfort, which is, I should stress, not aligned to any notions of imposed morality. It is at once much simpler and more complex than that. We are beginning to feel like ‘Peeping Toms’.

Being outside of their ‘relationship’ we have become spectators rather than collaborators and this is leading to a sense of unease, which is separate from any shared happiness we might be feeling at two people who we care for who are so clearly enjoying each other’s company.

This raises the much larger issue of developing relationships within the group and the extent to which this quite common phenomena will impact on the ways in which we work. Even existing as a ‘suspicion’ it appears to have done so already. The group has always been friendly *as a group*, rather than as a collection of cliques. Notwithstanding this, however, each of the performers has another they feel closest to. Glenn Robertson and Sarah Skelton are close friends; Sarah and Glenn are also close to Anna Garnett. Elizabeth Hague and Sarah Robertson are friends, as are Chris Roberts and Andrew Proudfoot. Anke Sauthof is very friendly with Laurent Ruggeri, while Laurent has become firm friends with both Chris and Andrew. For my own part, I knew Glenn Robertson and Chris Roberts well before work started on *At Last Sight*, and I have a relaxed relationship with each of them.

This is not to suggest that I in any way gravitate towards them - I do not believe that I do - but it does indicate a history which has informed the comfortable way we are in each other's company. There is a common bond of humour in the group, which makes for a pleasant informality and which goes some considerable way towards undercutting the pressures of making and presenting performance.

The balance of these sub-groups has been altered by the developing relationship between Chris and Sarah.

There is also the question as to the extent to which the nature of *At Last Sight* should be held accountable for this relationship. My instincts and experience tell me that to credit (?) the production with bringing these two people together solely because of its insidiously seductive themes would be a mistake. It is in the nature of making performance rather than in the nature or theme of that which is made that result in romantic pairings. Working anti-social hours, often late into the night or at weekends, means that any socialising which is done tends to remain within the group. This, together with a shared interest and the emotional investment which comes with commitment to a project, can often result in relationships which might not have occurred under other, less intense, circumstances. Whilst it is true that this is the case, it would be naive of me to suggest that an on-stage or in-performance intimacy is not possessed of the capability to bleed into off-stage lives. Certainly, *At Last Sight* is a project that draws its strength from the advertised fiction of individual relationships within the group and it is easy to see how the edges between *that* reality and the one that takes place in a non-performative privacy might become blurred. It is enough, perhaps, to recognise



that *At Last Sight* has been a catalyst for this particular change within these two lives and to leave it, at least for the moment, at that.

#### **4: A section of guitar playing by Laurent Ruggeri.**

This was only ever included/created as a means of giving Laurent 'something to do'. That shows. There is no appropriate rationale for this scene; within the seeming irrationality of *At Last Sight* this moment has always jarred ... it is far too sentimental and it labours its point. Laurent's role within the piece has always been an awkward one to define - much like that of Anke Sauthof. Laurent and Anke were each drafted into *At Last Sight* in order to provide both a stronger European feel to the work and also to frame the on-stage action, providing a point of contextualisation for the spectators. The problem with this has been that they have not been sufficiently challenged in any way by these demands. As *people*, rather than *performers*, I feel as though I have an obligation to provide them with material, or moments, which make Anke and Laurent feel fully integrated within the group. I should stress that this is due to no canvassing on their part, as they have each recognised, and with some considerable sensitivity and maturity, that *At Last Sight* is being created, at least in part, as a vehicle for the assessment of final year students. The difficulty is that, with Anke and Laurent, I feel at times as though I am painting with people, treating these two performers as though they were colours to be used as judiciously or as ruthlessly as I feel, without recourse to their own personal needs. On a directorial level, I have no desire to create extra material for them, and in terms of my role as a teacher I have no compulsion to provide assessable moments ... neither of them is engaged in *At Last Sight* as part of any assessment whatsoever. It is more a case of responding to them as members

of a group - which they have surely now become - and treating them as fairly as I would the original cast.

**5: The 'final' scene, where Chris Roberts speaks about sitting in the silence of thought.**

As I have previously mentioned, the ending of *At Last Sight* is at present too neat. The ending, as it currently stands, presents the spectator with an overly sentimentalised view, which none of us within the group feel is appropriate to the work. An emotional response seems to be called for from the spectators without the work having *earned* that response with an emotion-inducing structure. The literal quality of this section of the text: "In the silence of thought we sit ... close to the point where our breaths barely mist the glass." is at once too conclusive and too retrospectively narratological. It reads as though *At Last Sight* is seeking to cloak itself in the status of wistful memory and nothing else. The scene has only survived this long because of unwillingness on my part to let go of the words. Words which appeal to a mawkish aspect of my own personality, and which only being heard uttered within the context of full performance has taken me to the point where I can see the necessity for excision.

**19-3-99**

I have to address here the fact that my interest within *At Last Sight* is to *deal with* sentimentality, whereas my own subconscious predilection draws me towards a sentimentality that simply *is*. It is as though the process of performance making functions as a form of exorcism, forcing a degree of control onto certain aspects



of my own life. I am aware of the distrust of sentimental art, both in academic and aesthetic circles, a distrust that says that sentimentality *per se* must be treated with a type of ironic distance for fear of falling into a *Mills & Boon* world of handkerchief-wringing romance. I can recognise in my own responses to sentimental material a willingness to engage uncritically, which might seem to sit uneasily with the cynicism of my adopted (?) pose of world-weariness. Notwithstanding this, I do not regard this as symptomatic of any dishonesty on my part. Rather, I feel that the two aspects of sentimentality and cynicism find a balance in the creation of performance. For it is only at this place that the battle is in any way joined. Elsewhere in my life the two are able to function through a separation which is as comfortable as I could hope for. In this way, I am able to respond to a film such as *The English Patient* with tears which would never fall (would never be *allowed* to fall) if the same piece of work were to be staged in a theatre.

Seen in this way, *At Last Sight* emerges as a rather different type of cathartic experience to that which I had originally envisaged ... if 'originally' can be taken here to refer to the beliefs I held at the start of both this project and this thesis. Whereas I had believed - however many thousand words and hours and thoughts ago - that the autobiographical content of *At Last Sight* was central to this notion of catharsis for the artist, I am now beginning to realise that what has been more important has been the relationship between that written content and this realised form. The catharsis, such as it can be said to apply in this case, is arrived at *via* a balancing of romantic ideas of redemption (my own) and the recognition of irredeemtion (also my own) when the past bleeds penitence-like into every aspect

of the present. *At Last Sight* stands then not as a staged diary of what was, so much as the staging of what is. Encountered in this way, the entire piece becomes a necessary coming to terms with two aspects of my own personality. The public nature of performance may make the therapeutic side of this read as an indulgent abuse of the spectator/performer relationship, although my feeling is that a viewing of *At Last Sight* in production would not in itself suggest that the work has been thus driven.

Jung said that “the work in process becomes the poet’s fate and determines his psychic development. It is not Goethe who creates *Faust*, but *Faust* which creates Goethe.”<sup>6</sup> If this is the case, then *At Last Sight* has been, and remains, an indication, albeit unclear, of who I am. The process of creating the work began with a vague and confused intimation of a potential resolution; a resolution that would reveal itself as the piece progressed. In this, I can see now that there was considerably more intimation than determination. There was always a sense of inspiration, of a discernible type of impulse which has kept *At Last Sight* moving along, but this inspiration has never been harnessed to a projection of how the piece might appear in performance. At this post-Liege point, I am still in the process of creating, at the same time as that which has been created up to now has given me a strong sense of how the work will look in May. It is almost as if the group is now engaged in a process of interpretation rather than devising. The ‘text’ to be interpreted is the text as it was presented in Liege. The canvas is no longer blank, making choices easier, even in the midst now of a compromise to earlier freedoms.



Now that the work of *At Last Sight* is partly formed, it seems easier to write about the processes leading up to it. It is as though the concentration on creation worked against analysis even if *at that time* the analysis did not seem particularly problematic. Analysis might be thus seen to have diluted something of the tension necessary to create a production. In endeavouring to express the aims of *At Last Sight* it may be the case that the practical work itself has drifted too far towards becoming (little more than) an exposition of concepts. This is not to say that *At Last Sight* has suffered from my twin role as artist and analyst. The work is what the work is and can never be anything other than that. What has happened, and is still happening, is that that which would ordinarily remain subconscious has been summoned to the fore more than would be the usual case. In this fashion, the pages of this thesis can provide the reader with a series of insights that may be of some assistance in determining what happens during the processes of making performance. The thesis is adhering then to what it set out to be: not a general survey of performance-making - although it does contain that wider implication - but as detailed a reflection as is proving possible of the concerns noted during the making of *this* production at *this* time.

Whilst it remains the case that this thesis has an intended application in the field of performance, it is being written - just as *At Last Sight* is being created - within a belief that the 'old' ideology which had it that all of the arts were subject to particular forms suggested or even imposed by works within the same field, is being replaced. It is being replaced by a conviction that any creative work, of any type, can lead us towards a meditation on the process of creation itself. Such a cross-fertilised approach to study is not forced. In the same way that any maker of



art who wishes the process to remain as something alchemical is unlikely to find comfort in this thesis. Some makers of work will instinctively feel that a process of analysis is little more than an attempt to undermine the powers of creativity; that artists are meant to know their art through the making of it and through that making alone. There is a certain logic here. But only if one considers logical the notion that an extended period of analytical pre-requisition would effectively curtail all action. If, for example, one were to refuse to participate in the action of breathing until such time as that person had made a detailed analysis of the nature of breath s/he would asphyxiate long before the dissemination of any findings. This may well be the case. But this thesis is not concerned with the holding off of the breath of performance. On the contrary, it is the concern of this thesis that it is only through attaching a high degree of importance to the analysis of creativity that we will be able to contemplate the act of making with the same level of discipline that we have for centuries applied to studies of that which has already been made.

We can find a ready example of this in the work undertaken on *At Last Sight*. What we have seen in this thesis is evidence that a number of decisions made during the ‘making process’ have been arrived at out of a state which I can now recognise as alternating between self and other. By this, I refer to that state whereby the ‘self’ of the creator is tempered on occasions by the ‘other’ of the spectators-to-be. In other words, that which the self of the director creates is always already modified, or mediated, by an advance awareness, or at least a prediction, of the judgement of others. Of the work’s spectators. It follows then that any assessment which I am able to make, either now or at some future time, of *At Last Sight* will inevitably necessitate the opting for one or other of these mutually exclusive positions. They



are inclusive in the process of making and exclusive when it comes to an assessment of that which is made. If I intend to analyse *At Last Sight*, I need to first be able to make a distinction between an investigation into the creative processes involved in making the work and an analysis of the work's values as a production. I can only consider *At Last Sight* either in relation to myself as a director/writer/creator or in relation to my perceptions of the work when I am positioned as a spectator. This may seem to be suggesting a compartmentalisation of roles which does not really, or at least not so neatly, exist. A spectator in Liege may have regarded certain elements of *At Last Sight* that may have been arrived at through some 'accident' of rehearsal as illustrative of a particular line of enquiry in my directorial mind. In this way, the spectator has become the producer of meaning.

Where this collapsing of roles is an integral element of spectatorship, it is one which I, in my chosen role as maker, reader and writer, need to maintain some considerable control over. This is the nature of research into practice. In examining the nature of making, one also casts a new light on the made. This is not about homogenisation. All processes are different, in degree if not always in kind. History has revealed to us, for example, that Mozart thought out symphonies, even entire operatic scenes, and then transcribed these 'completed' ideas onto paper. Beethoven, on the other hand, wrote fragments of themes in copious notebooks, which he worked on and developed for years before formatting them as symphonies.<sup>7</sup> One artist plunges into the moment, the other treads warily around the edges. This thesis is attempting no documented hierarchy of approaches, any more than it is suggesting that the processes involved in *At Last Sight* are

somehow preferable to those sanctioned in any other project at this or any other time. Just as one can regard that which has been produced by either Mozart or Beethoven through the lens provided by a knowledge of the tools of their own creation, so any all work can be enhanced by an analysis of how the piece was made.

20-3-99

Performances may be made in many different ways and all creation of performance is to some degree automatic. But there is at certain times a very full consciousness of the process, or at least of such of its aspects as are open to introspection. Notwithstanding this, there are, as far as I am aware, no thorough accounts of the production processes of specific works.<sup>8</sup> With *At Last Sight* I am able to say that the text was a beginning. Although it would be undeniably true(er) to regard this text itself as a stage along a process long ago commenced. The written text still stands as a reasonable place to start. Reasonable, that is, inasmuch as the genesis of the text has been dealt with in Chapter One.

I can see now that early drafts of the text were weak, in that they failed to establish a diverse enough balance of moods and images. The structure of that early text gives few, perhaps too few, clues to a subsequent director ... even when that director is also the writer. There is something of emerging importance to me now in the text that has not been at all made clear: and that is the meaning of the sea in relation to the image of the woman. For it is not enough that the sea is constructed as a method of that woman's subsequent death. The sea also seems *now* to exist as some sort of force of nature (like the relentless nature of the rain, which is also mentioned on many occasions) which is relative and of some considerable



significance to the force of the woman. The obscurity, even I might say the *invisibility* of this meaning seems now to me to be a central failing of the text. A failing which has reverberated throughout the process of taking that text to this point as a performance.

The work undertaken on *At Last Sight* up to this point in time has been an aspect of an *act* of understanding, and also an *attempt* at understanding. It can be described as the effort of a man to present an account of his relationship to a world that allows him little certainty and vast regrets. This account has been at once performative and public.

The structures engaged in were created with a predominance of forethought, even at those times when I was perhaps unable to see which way certain rehearsals and ideas were going. I would hesitate to regard these aspects here as completely accidental, although they were often informed by the random. The processes undertaken in the rehearsal process *made space* for the random to occur, and this in itself comprised a deliberate form. Because of this, I can see that *At Last Sight* has arrived at the transitional point that it now occupies through a series of *intentions* rather than *calculations*. There has been a strict, even a rigorous intent, which has allowed the separate elements of the work, as in Hockney's *Joiners*, to merge into one another without any absolute demarcation ... often being possessed of multiple functions. Being one thing at the same time as they are also another.

Historically and currently, the making of performance has a practical aim. The standard question tends not so much towards an asking of 'Where did the work

come from and why was it made?' as to 'What did the performance achieve?'. The Why and Where of the first question are never usually taken beyond the guessing stage, precisely because, in the language of those who most often will it to be so, performance is not easily made subject to the conditions of the scientific laboratory. Experiments can never be repeated, because the conditions, the human conditions of performance are never even remotely the same from one experiment to the other. Performance is creation. It moves and transmutes, even as we watch. It amounts to a type of knowledge that one could not be in possession of before the fact. We can say, therefore, that *At Last Sight* is not comprised of knowledge *about* something else ... *At Last Sight* is the fullness of its own knowledge. It is what it is, which is not to say that it is not, in its Joineresque aspirations, always also referring to the world of something else.

If, at the outset of this project, I considered myself to be engaged in the theatricalisation of an abstracted version of my own history, I have since come to realise that what I have (or had) to tell is not nearly so important as the process of telling itself. There is no goal. Whatever it is that I thought I knew, that I felt such a strong urge to tell, has become increasingly unstable, unfixed. I have invented, distorted, lied, exaggerated and selected material for inclusion in this thesis in much the same way that I continue to work on *At Last Sight*; collapsing the processes of writing and directing in on each other. The edges have blurred to the point where I am no longer sure where practice ends and analysis begins. I am giving myself over, increasingly, to a state of knowing nothing in advance. Not the next line, not even the next word. What I am developing as a consequence is a faith in my own



ability to articulate the process of making, and to embrace the confusion therein with relish.

The mystery of the sentence to come (of the rehearsal to come) is always there, but the *existence* of that mystery is no longer mysterious in and of itself. Understanding, it seems, is not about solving the mysteries of making work so much as accepting that these mysteries are simply so.

This thesis is about the ways in which writing relates to performance. That is what I want the thesis to be. Where this results in non-linearity, with sections of this thesis shifting from documentation and reportage to analysis and supposition without warning, the writing is at its closest approximation to the practice of making *At Last Sight*. By this I mean that the structure of this thesis is flexible enough to move with thoughts and ideas as they occur, rather than compartmentalising them into passages which, whilst appearing coherent, would actually give a false flavour of the process of making the performance project. Where this results in obfuscation rather than clarity the reader is asked to accept this as a necessary by-product of writing which is engaged in during rather than after the fact. The process is intrinsically elliptical in that spaces are left open, only to be filled in at a later stage. This is a deliberate act, for if the *process* of making *At Last Sight* is the object of the research, then it is appropriate that that process is articulated as much through the form of this writing as it is in the content. Words that might more comfortably sit within a concluding chapter are presented as part of the fabric of *making* because they are an integral part of it. They are, in fact, not so much ‘conclusions’ as moments of insight, which are wont to occur at the least

expected times. To record them in note-form as a prelude to a later 'writing up' would be to create a record of the production-process which augurs against the slippery nature of the creative activities undertaken.

Confusion does not emerge, therefore, as the consequence of an unclear treatment so much as the inevitability of an unclear act. An act(ivity) within which certainty is sacrificed to a faith in doubt. A thesis is generally regarded as an exercise in left-brain thinking. It is logical, rational and systematic.<sup>9</sup> Creative activity, conversely, is a right-brain dominated process. As Stefan Brecht tells us

The brain is functionally asymmetric .... It has been known for a little over a century now that it is the left brain that all in all, - linguistic and manual dexterity being coupled - is the linguistic, - has the powers of speech and speech-comprehension, writing and reading: but during the last thirty years, the right brain has emerged as particularly endowed with visual powers, the seer .... It seems clear that as naming is the left brain's tool of analysis, so the right brain's syntheses are spatial metaphors.<sup>10</sup>

If the documentation of *At Last Sight* is to contain an awareness of the contradiction between writing and doing, at the same time as it is seeking to dissolve some of those contradictions in the writing itself, then a simple and clear record of the event is entirely inappropriate. Working in the way that it is this thesis stands as an attempt at avoiding the status of unchallengeable 'evidence', even in the midst of its reliance on the evidence of experience. The fixed nature of a thesis will tend to work against the fluidity of approach that is central to the making of *At Last Sight*. As soon as the thesis is typed, bound and presented as an artefact of learning, it acquires a quality that the process it is trying to articulate



never had. We can go further than that and say that the qualities expected of a thesis are at odds with the spontaneous and accidental qualities employed and encountered in devising performance. That which exists as one of a series of possibilities runs the risk of calcification through ink into a specific set of actions, as though that which happened could only ever have occurred in the way that it did.

The question then is ‘How can this process of creative slippage be documented?’ How can the documentation avoid the pitfalls of closure, when the practice it stems from is seeking an open and free interaction between spectator and performer, between the watcher and the watched? One way - and it is the way of this thesis - is to recognise the writing as a dialogue with the self. The activity of writing is an inevitable disseminating agent, but that which is written is primarily comprised of a making sense of making work. It seems logical then to see the thesis as being as indicative of a concern with my own understanding as it is with the understanding of any future readers. Which brings us back to Jung’s reading of the symbiosis between Goethe and his *Faust*. The core of this thesis, as indeed one could speak of the core of *At Last Sight*, is the maker’s address to the being made ... which is in a constant state of slippage. Other researchers might adopt a more overtly divisive approach to the same relationship, separating out more cleanly the distinctions between action and analysis. In this way, writing a series of descriptions, followed closely by an attendant and thorough reading of those actions - by the construction of an event and its subsequent deconstruction - a clear(er) communication would emerge. But that clarity would disguise its own insidiously coercive intent.

In much the same way, any once-held distinctions between objective and subjective responses have been exposed as invidious and false. Everything has emerged as illusive. There have been, throughout the process so far, no solid facts to address, other than the facts of writing, rehearsal and performance ... and the factual nature of these phenomena have been compromised, and permanently so, by my own interests and prejudices. In writing this thesis, even such deformations and distortions which exist are not, however, necessarily *untruths*. The realisation that fiction and invention constitute the very fabric of life means that those elements infiltrate even the most scholarly and well intended of pursuits. In performance, as in other forms of art, it can be said that one adopts a mask in order then to tell the truth. But when the line between truth and false is so unclear (if it can even be said to be there at all) then how can the writer's words be trusted? All that can be said is that the words 'lies' and 'truth' have lost much of their presumed currency at the same time as this thesis and *At Last Sight* are beginning to establish their own.

Even those memories that have been regarded as 'inspiring' the text are not necessarily trustworthy. How accurately can I trust my memory, even before the activity of selection and of poeticising take their toll on truth? How can I trust this report as a truthful rendition of that which has occurred? How can I trust my memory of this morning's rehearsal and this afternoon's thoughts?

If a flawed and increasingly suspect memory continues to prove central to *At Last Sight* - inasmuch at least as the work began with the structured recollection of certain of my own memories - then we can also say that memory is the mainstay of art.<sup>11</sup> We can say this because all imaginative thought is in one vital way an



exercise of memory. We are not able to imagine anything that we do not already know.<sup>12</sup> Through this we can suggest that the ability to imagine is actually the ability to remember. We remember that which we have already experienced and we apply it to a new situation. Creative imagination is thus comprised of an ability to harness memory to invention. It is an action of the mind that produces a new idea or insight from out of the known.

Looking at *At Last Sight* like this I can recognise a startling deficiency in my own utilisation of memory. I can identify a weakness that tells me much, now, about the ways in which *At Last Sight* is operating. My own subconscious approach to memory has been to seek to reproduce that memory rather than to exploit it in some new way. My memory is thus inclined to stay resolutely in the past. Where somebody else might be able to fashion the same memories as mine (if the reader will allow this flight of fancy) into a new situation, I have so far been unable to achieve this. The domestic nature of my memories has not been transformed into other than a domestic treatment of a domestic theme. Unable, or unwilling, to turn *how it was* into *how I would now choose it to be*, I find I am repeating history. I am, I feel, too often offering memory in place of imagination.

This realisation - and it is one which has occurred to me only during this session at my desk - has evaded me during four full months of rehearsal and some eighteen years as a student, practitioner and teacher of theatre. If evidence were ever needed of the importance of reflection on one's own practice then it is surely provided here. Whether or not I am able to act on this realisation is a different matter; but this difference in no way negates the value of the discovery. The die of

*At Last Sight* may well be cast too far to re-assess the ways in which the group (for let us not forget that all decisions made are made within the certainty of *group*) are either willing or able to act on this 'new' knowledge. Assuming, that is, that the words written here are fed constructively back into the practical work.

What is occurring most emphatically at this point in time is an informed (re) consideration of the project that was, is and is becoming *At Last Sight*. On one level, I have a confidence in the work which stems from my own feelings about the ways in which the piece has progressed, and also the ways in which the 'product' seemed to be perceived in Liege. By this I refer to the belief I have that the work thus far has contributed to a new and valid insight into the language of performance. That is a large claim. It is one I need to justify. A part of that justification is a sense of how well the work – the research-project – builds on practical and theoretical approaches currently at large.

21-3-99

Joseph Kosuth has suggested that "Art 'lives' through influencing other art, not by existing as the physical residue of an artist's ideas",<sup>13</sup> and the Standing Committee of University Drama Departments (SCUDD) has defined practice as research as being that which will "lead to new or substantially improved insights".<sup>14</sup> According to these criteria, it would appear that the analytical approach to the work of *At Last Sight* is moving the thesis in the right direction. Despite the fact that I am not yet able to affirm that the production/thesis *has* influenced other art, I have a growing confidence that it *will*. On one level I can relate this to my own future



work ... for how could I make work after *At Last Sight* which would fail to draw upon the work of its own past? But this is to subvert Kosuth's statement to too great a degree. It is more acceptable to suggest, and indeed to aspire, to the idea that a significant proportion of readers of this thesis (and spectators to the practice) will elaborate in some way upon the ideas encountered therein. My role as a lecturer in the university sector means that this presumption is made more watertight than might otherwise be the case. My teaching has already been influenced by the work undertaken on this 'project' (by which I refer to the thesis and *At Last Sight*) and it is inevitable that a number of those students who are made subject to my teaching are going to be 'influenced' by my approaches.

This type of influence, however, is not determined by any intrinsic quality. It is a fact of education that a tutor's own bias will infiltrate even the most rigorously exclusive curriculum. In this way, the 'influence' of the work done and the 'residue of an artist's ideas' become almost impossible to separate. The residue of ideas could, albeit somewhat harshly, be said to define much of what passes for research-driven teaching. Accordingly, if I talk long and hard enough to my students about the contents of this thesis then I will undoubtedly sway (some of) them, if only through insistence, towards a belief in the sanctity of these words. This is influence through persuasion ... through indoctrination. In some ways - actually, in *key* ways - this thesis acts as its own defence against influence-by-rote. If there is anything constant within the pouring out of words it is that provocation is prioritised over prescription. The thesis is thus always in one way arguing against itself. The solid appearance of the lines on the page is undercut by the fragility of any faith in the lines' own worth.



In this way, the thesis is locating itself as postmodern in its form, rather than the modernist analysis of a postmodern form. Postmodernism has been described by Jean-Francois Lyotard as a working without rules in order to establish the rules of that which has been made. Arguing against the 'solace of good forms', he suggests that postmodern practice is a

... search for new presentations, not in order to be able to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. A postmodern artist ... is in the position of a philosopher: the ... work he produces (is) not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and ... cannot be judged according to a determined judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for .... Hence the fact that work and text have the characters of an *event*; hence also, they always come too late for their author.<sup>15</sup>

Taking this criterion we can make a case that its application is central to notions of all creative activity. When we say that an artist is creative, we do not do so because s/he has demonstrated an ability to obey rules which were known before the work was made, so that the artist only succeeded in doing that which had been done before. We acknowledge as creative those artists whose work is seen to embody something that did not exist before. This is an implicit recognition of the creative artist as the originator of the rules s/he followed. Afterwards, other artists might deliberately follow these same rules and thereby achieve a similar 'success', but these artists are not engaged in the same level of creative activity.

The creative artist - like Lyotard's paradigmatic postmodernist - does not know what the target is. Although there is a degree of 'aiming', the artist is unlikely to



know precisely where this aim will lead until *after* the event. Creativity in terms of making performance is not then a model of a purposive activity ... that is to say it is not indicative of an activity which is engaged in and consciously controlled so as to produce a desired result. At the time of making the performance of *At Last Sight* for Liege, I was impelled to engage in that type of creative activity, but I was unable to envisage the results of that endeavour. The performance at Liege was largely unimaginable to myself in October 1998, when I met with the student-cast. This also applies to the performers themselves. None of the group had any real sense, from day to day, of the ways in which *At Last Sight* would develop in subsequent rehearsals. Each day was a making without rules in order to establish the rules of that which was being made. Our collective activity has not then been controlled or shaped overmuch by a desire for a predicted result.

This is not to say that the group has not been conscious of a certain direction, however vague this direction has been. We have known that our work has been heading towards a series of public performances, for example. The sense of direction has actually been more acute than this. Without any idea as to whether certain decisions were 'right' or 'wrong', I would have been unable to develop the work directorially through rehearsals, and the performance suggestions of the cast would have been considerably less valid than they have been in practice. Creative activity in the making of performance can be defined then as an activity which is subject to an applied critical control by the artists involved, at the same time as this control does not amount to any imitation-seeking foresight regarding the work to be made.

22-3-99

The ability to discriminate between levels of appropriateness in terms of the input of group members has required, of all of us, a certain fastidiousness in ongoing critical judgements ... and these judgements are more focused now than at any time previously. Each of the participants has developed a vocabulary of discrimination to the point where rehearsals now have a discernible coherence. We are becoming aware of the *direction* that *At Last Sight* is moving in only now that the piece has arrived at its first venue. The rules have been established, at least in part, to the extent where we are perhaps every bit as effective as we have ever been, but rather less creative than in the early stages of the work. In the same way that I am now able to use the past tense to describe certain processes, *At Last Sight* is both done and undone ... completed in one sense and also liable to significant change. The shift in tense is therefore both deliberate and inevitable.

The 'product' of Liege is informing the ways in which the 'product' of Chester is now being shaped. This brings with it the possibility of new directions. Of the establishment of new rules of making, informed now by our developing understanding of the old.

The performance artist, Chris Burden has put the argument that functionalism in art amounts to no more than propaganda, suggesting that the act of functionalism is intrinsically antithetical to creativity.<sup>16</sup> There is a sense of an anti-functionalist approach in *At Last Sight*, inasmuch as only in a very qualified sense would I be able to say that I had before me any 'problem' which I felt that the work could provide a solution for. Perhaps it would be more apposite to say that any functionalist value which might be ascribed now or at any future time to *At Last*



*Sight* would not be the result of a response to conditions set before the work was commenced. In terms of its artistic creation, the formulation of problems and the solution to those problems amount to one and the same phenomenon. The process of making the work can be revealed as at once creating the work and discovering that which the work has to say. The process is comprised of inseparable elements. The event thus created is a product of art, in that it is as new and unexpected to the maker(s) as it is to its audience. This creates a seeming contradiction. *At Last Sight* is presenting itself to the creating group as an event which has controlled our activities and which has resisted a great deal of our own attempts at control, and yet it is at the same time the product of a working through of tensions which we can recognise as being our own. It no more or less belongs to the group than we do to it.

**24-3-99**

In the course of writing this chapter, one of the performers has left the group. Her reasons for doing so do not impact on this thesis - or indeed on the remaining rehearsals for *At Last Sight* - so much as her absence now necessitates a re-working of the piece, which will go beyond the relatively straightforward changes suggested at this chapter's start. It also provides me with a valuable bringing down to earth. Just as I have been exercising certain theoretical positionings within the pages of this thesis, so an unforeseen act on the part of a student, Anna Garnett, has brought with it a reminder of the power of the random. In the midst of feeling that all is going well, something has happened to undercut that complacency. To say that the flow of this chapter is broken is to state no more than the reader will already know. But this has come at a useful time. It serves as a cautionary notice that this thesis is a response to the work of the production, and that the production

itself is still too unfinished, too unmade, to attempt to write about it as though it were now in the past.

The irony of discovering this student's departure at the same time as I was writing about the group belonging to the work and the work belonging to the group is harsh. That the practical work is demanding now of renewed energies on the part of all its remaining members is apparent. I have not yet spoken with the group about Anna Garnett. She is in the process, I believe, of returning to her home in Scarborough, where she will either attempt to complete her studies by a negotiated package of distance learning, or she will rest and re-apply for entry in the new academic year. What this will do to the spirits of the group is impossible to predict with any accuracy, although my suspicions are that they will respond with the same level of maturity, adaptability and positivity that they have shown since the project began. Notwithstanding their practical responses, I suspect that they, like me, will feel betrayed by the sudden nature of Anna's decision to leave Chester, recognising that her actions will inevitably make our own workloads that much harder to manage.

The following chapter will commence with an analysis of the students' individual contributions to *At Last Sight* in performance at Liege, alongside an explanation of key changes made prior to presentation in Chester.



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- <sup>1</sup> McAuley, G 'Towards an Ethnography of Rehearsal' in *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol. XIV, Part 1 (NTQ 53) February 1998. p.80.
- <sup>2</sup> *ibid.* p. 81.
- <sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p.76.
- <sup>4</sup> See Read, A. *Theatre and Everyday Life*. Routledge, 1995 and Boal, A. *The Rainbow of Desire*. Routledge, 1994
- <sup>5</sup> DV8 is a British-based physical theatre/dance company. The company was formed in 1986, under the direction of Lloyd Newson. Further information can be accessed by mailing the company on [dv8@xipe.nl](mailto:dv8@xipe.nl)
- <sup>6</sup> Jung, C.G., cited in *Critical Reasoning*. Thomson, A. Routledge, 1996. p.161.
- <sup>7</sup> See Spender, S 'The Making of a Poem' in Ghiselin, B. *The Creative Process*. New American Library, New York and Ontario, 1952 pp.112-125
- <sup>8</sup> I am basing this belief on an extensive book, article and thesis search.
- <sup>9</sup> See *Theses and Project Work*. Parsons, C.J. Heineman, London, 1978
- <sup>10</sup> Brecht, S. *The Theatre of Visions: Robert Wilson*. Methuen, London, 1994. pp. 9-10.
- <sup>11</sup> Williams, B. *Problems of the Self*. Cambridge University Press 1973. p. 13.
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p. 17.
- <sup>13</sup> Kosuth, J. *Art after Philosophy*. 'Studio International', October 1969. p. 78.
- <sup>14</sup> *Guide Lines for the Submission of Practical Projects in Drama, Dance and Performing Arts as 'Works'*. Standing Committee of University Drama Departments (SCUDD). Published April 1995.
- <sup>15</sup> Lyotard, J.F, *Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?* In 'Innovation/Renovation', Hassan, I. and Hassan, S. (eds.), University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1983. pp. 81-82.
- <sup>16</sup> Burden, C. in *Talking Art*, Searle, A. (Ed), Institute of Contemporary arts, London, 1993. p. 25

## Chapter Four

24-3-99

This chapter begins with an assessment of the performances of the students participating in *At Last Sight* in Liege. I do this not because I wish to venture here into issues of assessment for assessment's sake ... the status of the students *as* students works against that, even if such were my wish.

What I am attempting is an explanation of some of the changes currently being made, which is enhanced for the reader by an understanding of the context within which such changes are being suggested. The writing also serves the purpose of focusing my own attention as a course tutor on the individual performances, rather than concentrating in a solely directorial fashion on the performance as a whole. In this way, I should be able to make suggestions to the students, which will provide them with opportunities to feel satisfied with their work when they are assessed in six week's time.

The assessment offered here is a brief one. The thesis is not *about* the successes or otherwise of individual performances. As such, an appraisal of their relative abilities is necessary only inasmuch as it informs the decisions-to-be-made of future rehearsals. The appraisal entered into here is hindered as much as it is helped by access to video footage of the performance at the Salle Les Chiroux in Liege. It is helped in that I am able to watch what happened in order to refresh my memory; it is hindered in that what I am watching on video is not what 'happened'. As Gay McAuley remarks



A video recording of theatrical performance will be misread by people who see only through their experience of television, or who expect a 'replacement performance' rather than an analytical document.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst my role as joint-creator of *At Last Sight* means that I cannot be regarded, in this instance, as one who sees only through an experience of television, it is true that

Video ... impose(s) the single perspective of the camera's eye ... while the camera also 'sees' much less than the human eye. In visual terms, theatrical expressivity depends crucially on the simultaneous functioning of detail ... the detail of objects and interactions and the ever-present reality of the performance space as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

There is a sense wherein watching a videotape still reads to us as the thing-as-it-was.<sup>3</sup> We know this to be false at the same time as we are seduced by the images before our eyes. We feel this to a much lesser extent, I think, with still photographs. The Polaroid photographs from Liege provide a distorted record of *At Last Sight*, equal in distortion to the video itself. But, perhaps for no greater reason than the fact that photographs offer an overt and unmistakably *fixed* picture of an event that happened through time, we regard them as partial traces of the documentation process and the video as a 'true record'.

Because of the inevitability of 'preserving' something of *At Last Sight* in performance, if only to assist in the reader's understanding of the work, I need to start thinking now about ways in which this act of preservation can be enhanced. One possibility is of using a number of cameras and editing the footage together in such a way that multiple perspectives are being offered at any one time. This is

an example suggested by McAuley, who states that the use of three cameras allows synchronisation

... so that the tapes will play together. It is entirely feasible for a spectator to view three images simultaneously, scanning from one screen to another in a way which may approximate the theatre spectator's pattern.<sup>4</sup>

Watching the video of *At Last Sight* in Liege (which was filmed with one camera from the centre of the audience) allows the eye to wander to a certain extent, but the manner of its filming suggests nothing of the deliberateness of this as a directorial concept within the live performance. I need to address this matter when it comes to creating a video record of *At Last Sight* at University College Chester in May. In heeding McAuley's recommendations I need also to resist the temptation to transform the video footage into an independently aesthetic artefact. The video has a purpose as an aid to understanding ... that is its intent.<sup>5</sup>

**25-3-99**

I am aware of the contradiction here in offering any assessment of Anna Garnett's contribution, when that particular student is no longer a part of the group. However, it may well be the case that Anna Garnett's sole assessment for this module may rest on my own interpretation of her practical application within the production. We are unable to offer a 'process' mark to students (much to their anger and disappointment), but this does not mean that this will necessarily be the case under a situation such as this. If Anna Garnett manages to negotiate a conclusion to her degree studies where she is able to submit all remaining work from home, then it may be the case that a type of process mark for *At Last Sight* forms part of that overall assessment.



The remaining members of the group were surprised by Anna's sudden departure, and were suspicious as to her motivations. They remain, in fact, very angry at what they are regarding as a betrayal. As I wrote towards the end of Chapter Three, I am neither able nor inclined to enter into any details here regarding the reasons given by Anna Garnett, nor is it the business of this thesis for me to speculate here as to any other excuses. What *is* of concern to this thesis, is that I am able to write honestly and openly about the methods of making *At Last Sight*, and this freedom is somewhat compromised by my academic and pastoral responsibilities. All that I can do – or hope to do – is treat such passages where the preservation of the student's personal privacy is in conflict with the requisites of my own analytical approach with caution and care.

The matter has raised some interesting points. With the rest of the group, a student such as Chris Roberts, for example, I feel that I have *carte blanche* to write with freedom about any of his activities, attitudes or comments which happen during rehearsals. I feel this, in fact, with each of the remaining members of the group. I may then write something which runs counter to my role as a tutor, but I have the safety net of knowing (of *feeling*, of *believing*) that I will not be violating any principles of trust between us. This remains the case even at those times when the relationship between a member of the cast and myself is stretched to an almost intolerable degree. As it was with Sarah Robertson, whose role within *At Last Sight* was radically reconfigured no more than one hour before the audience entered the theatre. I will elaborate on the Sarah Robertson 'incident' during the course of this chapter. Any readers of this thesis will arrive at their own conclusions as to the validity of this decision, and indeed of the manner in which

the decision was employed. Suffice, at this stage and on my own part, to say that it was a decision I regret and one where, with the benefit of hindsight, I think I acted neither wisely nor well.

With Anna Garnett, who is now no longer a part of the group, the contract between cast and director is broken. This does not mean that I am about to delete any mention of her from those elements of this thesis which are already written (actually, very little mention has been made of her up to this point). It does mean that any criticisms I might have of her work up to and including Liege need to be couched in more cautiously structured terms than those I might use for the remaining performers are.

**26-3-99**

I will attempt my analysis of the specific performances by concentrating on individuals, rather than by going through the work chronologically. A script of the words created for (rather than *in*) the Liege performance has already been offered in an appendix, allowing the reader to locate the actions described within the framework of the wider performance.

Because I will be making no attempts to separate out my reading of individual performances from the wider issues of reflecting on their contributions to *At Last Sight*, it is expected that responses to the performance as a whole will permeate this chapter. Where the connections are clear no further explanation is required, where clarity gives way to seemingly disconnected patterns of thought I can do no more than state that the following words do indeed evidence connection. They do so inasmuch as the words written here are accurate traces of an ongoing process of



reflection and revision. Ideas do not emerge with an apparent logic, and this thesis offers no illusory evidence to the contrary.

It should also be pointed out that I am making the following readings of the participating students' contributions public with their full knowledge and approval.

### **1: Anna Garnett.**

Anna's performance was rather reserved. She is never a 'showy' performer, speaking quietly and without a great deal of animation. Physically, she is rather stilted: she has a tendency to move at a pedestrian pace. Her vocal range is very limited, and there is a peculiar flatness to her voice.

Her strongest moment in Liege, as it has generally been in rehearsal, was the section towards the end of the performance, where she speaks directly to the audience, saying 'My name is Anna Garnett ... I have been lying on this bed for some time ...' There was a sense of control and good timing here, which the audience seemed to acknowledge. Because the response from the audience during this section was both immediate and strong, Anna's confidence appeared to grow. She performed the section with relish. Had she remained a part of the group, this section was one I had no intention of changing. With the new situation, we need to see if any of the rest of the group would like to take this part. Only then will we be able to begin working through the logistics of re-apportioning sections, and dealing with the ramifications of this on the overall structure.

Unfortunately, other sections were not presented with the same degree of authority as was evidenced in the above paragraph. Anna's first moment of 'direct' communication with the audience (there is a lot of audience-address in *At Last Sight*) was awkwardly delivered, with no real sense of fitting in with any of the rest of the opening text. The flatness of her speaking voice (which is apparent even on the poor quality videotape) means that the start of a sentence does not seem to develop from the thoughts of the previous sentence. This works with 'My name is Anna Garnett ...' precisely because the text is meant to spring from nowhere. With other sections, the dislocation is acute, and acutely wrong. We have worked on Anna's delivery of the text, but no real progress has been made.

Another key section is Anna's dialogue with Andrew Proudfoot. The moment begins with Anna raising herself from the bed, dressing in Andrew's clothes and leaving. This is accompanied by spoken text, which is naturalistic in tone, at least by the standards of the rest of *At Last Sight*. Again, the quality of Anna's speaking voice serves to slow the scene down. Even when the movements are relatively swift and fluid, the spoken delivery is such that the impression given is one of lethargy. I was aware of Andrew's attempts to work against this, to energise the scene even further, by means of speech and action, in order to inject some much-needed pace, but this served only to exaggerate the problems which were already there. Anna was aware of this, and asked that the scene be cut. I still feel now, as I felt then, that the scene is an important element of *At Last Sight*, and a decision had been made, before Anna decided to leave the group, that Sarah Robertson would replace her in this section. In this, at least, Anna's departure is fortuitous,



as I have no doubts that Sarah will invest this section with the type of vitality which Anna has never been able to achieve.

There was a sense with Anna, that she did not always fully comprehend the ways in which *At Last Sight* was, and is being constructed. Anna often met the procedure through which certain moments of potentially empathetic engagement were undercut with contrasting scenes with a type of incredulity, despite the fact that we, as a group, had established this practice almost from the start. Perhaps this confusion was what was being made manifest in her performance ... as though she was never really aware of what performance mode was being required of her. I suspect that there is a degree of truth in this.

If this is the case, and I have to believe that it is, then I have to acknowledge a failing on my part to convey my intentions accurately enough. I wonder now, with the benefit of hindsight, whether I have ever really made my intentions clear to anyone in the group. A part of this is that I have never really had any 'intentions' in the first place. Much has happened instinctively, with the group developing a vocabulary of performance, which has, in its own turn, allowed us to develop *At Last Sight* throughout rehearsals. That which began as a difficult process of creation (effectively, making a performance without being able to articulate or even identify what it was that we were trying to make) has developed, smoothly, to my mind, into a process where we all (or nearly all) know the 'rules', without ever spending much time in their discussion. It is a process which many that have devised performance will be familiar with, despite the particularities of *At Last Sight*.

Writing this now is leaving me with no doubt that it has been Anna's awkwardness with the philosophy behind the process that has resulted in the awkwardness of her performance. It can be no accident that her moment of greatest 'success' (she, the group members the spectators and myself concur here) came with the delivery of an attitude of *naivety*. An attitude that was probably right for all, the wrong reasons.

As the audience entered Salle Les Chiroux on Wednesday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, the cast spoke freely with them, offering them glasses of wine, welcoming them to their seats and chatting with members of other companies who they had become familiar with. I was sitting at the back left of the auditorium, where I was able to see the spectators as well as the stage. It is never easy to gauge an accurate impression of a spectatorial response, but it seemed as though the audience found this opening interesting and engaging. I saw no embarrassed looking glances from one spectator to another, for example. The spectators appeared to be reading their programmes attentively. These programmes had been given to the spectators as they entered the seating area. At one point, Anna asked of one spectator - and with greater volume than at any other time during the performance - 'Have you read your programme?' It is hard here to describe how crass this sounded (and the video documentation from Liege has recorded the moment as something quite inconsequential). Certainly, we were all of us, including Anna, embarrassed by the words. We spoke about it, and indeed laughed about it, after the performance had ended. But at the time, it was a cringe-inducing question to ask.



The fact that Anna has gone may make this read like an attack on someone who has no immediate means of reply.<sup>6</sup> That is not the intention. I would write the same words of criticism if Anna were still here. ‘Have you got a programme?’ was a crass thing to say, not because it came across as such to the audience (I do not think it did), but because it was so *inappropriate* within the mood that we were endeavouring to create. It was simply wrong. In this, it was by no means the only ‘wrong’ moment in the night (Chris Roberts spoke the last line of *At Last Sight* in Liege, and it was so crushingly inappropriate as to be almost unbelievable). Anna’s *faux pas*, however, has to be considered within the context of her overall contribution, which was never as strong as that of her peers, and certainly much weaker than Chris Roberts’ was.

## **2: Glenn Robertson.**

Glenn arrived late in Liege. His passport had been left at his family home and he was unable to leave with the rest of the group on the evening of February 28<sup>th</sup>. He travelled out alone, arriving in Liege on March 2<sup>nd</sup>. There was no sense that Glenn’s delay had caused him any concerns, although the rest of us had been tense and anxious.

In performance, Glenn was comfortable. Having worked with him on two previous productions, Jim Cartwright’s *Road* and Jez Butterworth’s *Mojo*, in 1997 and 1998 respectively, I know how relaxed he is in front of an audience. For Glenn, an audience is regarded as a collection of friends rather than as a challenge. At times this frustrated other members of the group. There have been occasions when we have been struggling to work through certain sections in

rehearsal and Glenn has suggested that 'all we need now is an audience'. This approach suits Glenn, without necessarily being appropriate for everybody else. Notwithstanding this, his radiation of an at-ease demeanour has done much to settle any nerves, which might otherwise have descended upon the group. From my own perspective, I have become used to Glenn's inaccuracy with the words of *At Last Sight*. He has always been the last to learn any lines, preferring to improvise his way around the text. This means that the poetic qualities of the text are sometimes sacrificed, but the text itself (whatever text he chooses to speak) is fresh in a way that it might otherwise not have been.

This self-imposed freedom to roam around the text helped Glenn's performance. He has an easy charm, which makes his delivery conversational. His opening lines comprised a direct address to the audience, and the manner in which he delivered these lines established a rapport, which gave much of what followed its intimate and confessional *mien*.

If Glenn's performance had an overt weakness, it was that he laboured a little too hard at times towards creating and maintaining a tone of *pathos*. I am aware that this may seem at odds with my earlier description of him, which sought to present him as a 'natural' performer; but my words here are intended to elaborate on this very 'naturalness', rather than to contradict it. Glenn performs as though he *believes* in the words that he is speaking, as though the articulated mood stems from his own emotional background. This is no bad thing; indeed, to many minds it is the basis of plausible performance. However, it led, in Glenn's case, to a reduction in the offering of text-as-quote, which was and remains a feature of *At*



*Last Sight*. This is not intended as a harsh criticism – it is, in many ways, no criticism at all – so much as it is the recognition of an over-empathising on the performer's part. This was not an issue when Glenn *moved*. Physically, he seemed able to stand outside the piece, as it were, and *demonstrate* rather than *engage*. This was most apparent in the section where Glenn and Liz Hague played out the 'Arabella and Paris' scene ... a section where the performers described, both physically and verbally, an encounter between a couple in a hotel room. It seems as though Glenn *acts* when he moves and *feels* when he speaks. When the two are done together, the acting undercuts any potential for emotional overload; when he is relying solely on speech, he displays an actorly tendency towards naturalism, which sometimes runs counter to the intentions of *At Last Sight*.

Glenn is a prolific consumer of alcohol. He regularly drinks upwards of ten pints of beer as part of an evening's entertainment. As one would expect, knowing this information, the bottles of wine, which were placed in and around the performing area, held a considerable attraction, and Glenn drank perhaps three litres of red wine during the performance. In all, some twenty-eight bottles of wine were 'used' in *At Last Sight*, some of which were poured out for spectators. Glenn displayed no indication of drunkenness, remaining steady on his feet and sober in deed all evening. Indeed, as the performance progressed, Glenn moved into an overtly directorial mode of performance, organising cast members and moving them from one space to the next. This imbued his performance with a misleading authority, because his fellow performers knew, at least as well as did Glenn, precisely where they were meant to be from one moment to another. Glenn's height added to this on-stage 'authority'. He is six feet, two inches tall and has a

rather chunky frame. Seen next to the rest of the cast, none of whom are particularly tall, Glenn's size is exaggerated. He is the same age as most of the cast, and younger than some, and yet in appearance he seems considerably older.

**27-3-99**

In terms of achievements, Glenn's performance was mature. He was always calm and composed, despite the confusion which was inevitable once Sarah Robertson's role was altered so radically and so late. There was a steadiness to his work, which I believe the audience was calmed by. Bearing in mind the fact that many of the spectators believed in the improvised nature of *At Last Sight*, as we had suggested in the programme, this sense of calm was extremely useful. It helped the piece to look ordered even at those times when the illusion of disorder was being sought. Without Glenn's unflappable presence, *At Last Sight* may have appeared random to the point of unintelligibility.

**28-3-99**

### **3: Sarah Robertson.**

Sarah has never performed in a production at University College Chester, although she has done so elsewhere. This means that she has always been something of an unknown quantity to me. Whereas I am familiar with the work of the rest of the group, either from working with them on productions or from seeing them in work directed by colleagues, I had no idea what to expect from Sarah back in October.

She has impressed me with her sensitivity to the concerns of the written text, although this has not always been aligned to a commensurate consideration for the ways in which *At Last Sight* has been constructed. In many ways, it seems as



though her empathetic engagement with the content has actually worked against the undercutting of sentiment in much of the performance. There have been times – admittedly during the early stages of rehearsal – when Sarah would invest such a high degree of emotion into her ‘readings’ of the work that she found the abrupt nature of some of our departures very difficult to cope with. This was not the same thing as was happening with Anna Garnett. Intellectually, Sarah was fully aware of the effect we were seeking, but emotionally she seemed to go so deeply into the character of the words that she almost lost herself *in character*. She has always been the first to recognise emotional mood and resonance, which has been a real boon to the group; but the switching in and out of these moods has been problematic. Sarah has been aware of this, and her confidence has not been high. She is an incredibly self-critical performer ... to the point where she finds it almost impossible to conceal her disappointment when her delivery does not match her intention. Whereas the rest of the group-members are able to work through the inevitable disparities between thought and technique without breaking stride, Sarah is compelled to stop and apologise. She has to make public the voices in her head.

This has led to problems in rehearsal. Increasingly, as Sarah has arrested her work in this way, I became concerned that she would do the same thing in performance. In many ways this in-and-out-of-acting is precisely what *At Last Sight* is fuelled by; however, Sarah’s public corrections are so obviously (and at times painfully) *real* that they are exposing as sham the *acted* ‘corrections’ of the other members of the group. I have talked with her at some length about this, and I have said that there could well come a point where I would quite literally pull her from the work

if I felt that she was not achieving an ability to control these breaks. Sarah was, I think and hope, aware that I was not saying this as a threat designed to bully her into a different type of performance, so much as it was the articulation of my own genuine and increasing concerns.

By the time we got into *Salle Les Chiroux* Sarah had not managed one rehearsal without halting her own performance to either apologise to the group or myself or to berate herself for 'getting it wrong'. Her friends, particularly Elizabeth Hague, talked with her about this, with, it needs to be said, no discernible improvement in this area of Sarah's work. This has been particularly upsetting because Sarah's best work is really very good and she is always watchable. She has a type of presence which is exactly as it sounds ... she is present in the work. Her commitment and care are palpable and all she really needs to do is to believe in that. This may read like performance as self-help; as a blend of 1960's idealism and drama-as-therapy. If so, the words I am using are inappropriate and clumsy. What I mean to suggest is that Sarah's work is in no way particularly weaker than that of her peers, other than in her inability to move seamlessly through 'errors'. She is overly harsh on herself, and nothing the group or I can say seems to offset that.

What this is leading up to is the fact that in Liege, during our final scheduled rehearsal, Sarah was still unable to get through a run of *At Last Sight* without stopping. As soon as our last rehearsal was over, I told Sarah that her participation put the production at risk, and that I was going to pull her from the work. This



was some two hours before the audience arrived. Even as I said it, I knew it was a mistake.

Sarah was, quite naturally, deeply upset. More, I think, with herself than with me; although this may be wishful thinking on my part. I believe she expected me to respond in the way that I did. None of the rest of the group argued with my decision. I think they could all see it coming and felt a type of powerlessness. In hindsight, I wish I had acted differently. My decision hurt and embarrassed Sarah greatly, and I feel now that I should have put her feelings as a person, and as my student, ahead of my own concerns for the production. Perhaps an audience in front of her would have led to a different and more sustained type of concentration. I have no way of knowing whether this would have been the case.

Sarah went and sat in the dressing room as the rest of the group divided her sections up between themselves. I have to say that everybody dealt well with the consequences of Sarah's absence, and this included Sarah herself. She was bitterly disappointed, and yet responded with maturity and more good grace than I had any right to expect. I made it plain to Sarah that the events of today bore no relevance on future performances, and that I believed I had no real choice ... that to include Sarah in the performance at this stage was neither fair to herself or to her peers. Her performance had become like an accident waiting to happen. There was such a feeling of inevitability to her lapses that the cast was on tenterhooks every time she spoke a passage of text.

The closer we came to the performance the more upset Sarah became. She cried and was quite inconsolable. She sat in the audience space as we crammed in a last rushed rehearsal and her sobs acted as soundtrack for the performance. It was harrowing to experience. The emotion was so patently *real* that it functioned as a frame for everything on stage. I then asked if Sarah would be prepared to sit in the performance space, during the performance, and just allow her feelings, her tears and her pain, to be integrated into *At Last Sight*. I am not proud of asking this. It was an exploitative request, and one, which I would have considerable difficulty in justifying on any sort of humanitarian grounds. It was not a calculated request in the literal sense, because I simply asked it as I thought it; but it was cold and perhaps it was cynical. Sarah agreed to do as I asked, as much, I think, as a means of being part of the production as because she could see any logic in my thoughts.

What happened in performance was something I had not anticipated. Sarah's new and temporary 'role', of a young woman seated at upstage right and sobbing, gave a charge to the entire work. Members of the cast would crouch next to Sarah during the performance, touch her, dry her tears and share lit cigarettes. It was, on one level, as though *At Last Sight* had become her story. On another level, and much more emphatically, it read as though the sexual and emotional relationships within the group - which I had fabricated in the programme notes - were of such an intensity that Sarah, as an individual rather than as a 'performer', was simply unable to control her pain.

It was apparent to me at this stage, watching from the audience, that Chris Roberts had an emotional connection with Sarah that went beyond friendship. The ways in



which he touched and looked at her were of a different quality to the behaviour of the rest of the cast. I know now, from speaking with Chris and Sarah after the performance, that they have, for some time now, felt a growing attraction for each other, which they have struggled against and which now seems set to develop into a love affair. Chris has a situation with a long-term partner, which adds another level of difficulty to their feelings. In writing these words, I am inevitably running the risk of moving into areas which are personal to Chris and Sarah and, as such, are not the business of this thesis. However, it would be remiss of me not to record something here, which in its own turn cannot fail to impact on our future rehearsals. Affairs and sexual encounters between performers are common, no less so when those performers are students. In itself, it is generally no more or less than a consequence of late-night rehearsals and the close proximity, at times both emotional and physical, between people with shared interests. Performance is also always about looking. It provides one of the very few occasions in our society when we are invited and even compelled to watch each other. There is an unavoidable eroticism to this. It would be alarming in its own way if the erotic nature of this did not spill over into some type of sexual *frisson* between performers. Some directors will counsel against this, believing that sexual relationships within the cast work to the detriment of the cast *per se*; that jealousies, petty squabbles and perhaps even the collapse of the relationship will create problems. Others may feel that the group is what and who the group is. If they are lovers, so be it. If people in the group do not get on with each other, so be it.

29-3-99

With *At Last Sight* there is an irony to the fact that the lie of lovers is now becoming true. It is an irony, which I am happy to embrace. I feel no moral responsibility for their actions (or intentions), any more than I would if this were a production of *Julius Caesar*. The work is neither responsible nor accountable for any desires or passions within the cast. The group members are adults and are capable of arriving at their own decisions as to who they wish to be involved with and why. If Chris and Sarah become lovers during the time between now and the end of their time together in the group then we, as a group, have to live and deal with that in the same way that we are dealing with Anna Garnett's departure. It happens. On a positive level, I would expect their feelings for each other to be explored (exploited?) in future rehearsals and future performances. The work is as much about who the group members are and what they are feeling as it is about the words and actions we are seeking to present.

The rehearsals for *At Last Sight*, which we will soon recommence, will find Sarah Robertson doing as much of the work she has already rehearsed as she so wishes. What happened in Liege was a consequence of a series of phenomena, which are now history. The work is restarting, and so is Sarah. I have every faith in her. Not least because of the way she dealt with and worked through the disappointments of Liege. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Anna Garnett's disappearance means that the remaining cast will have more to do than we could have expected. Sarah is as enthusiastic as everyone else about the possibilities we now have to re-invent *At Last Sight*, to improve on something, which we are already pleased with.



One thing I should say is that the response of a number of spectators to Sarah's tears was incredible. Immediately after the performance, people, some crying themselves, approached Sarah and told her how brave they thought she had been to perform when she was so obviously upset. What they believed, having read their programme notes, was that Sarah, sharing the same surname as Glenn, was his wife. They assumed (and Sarah immediately confirmed this to them) that Glenn was conducting an affair with Anna and that Sarah had been left as a consequence of this. (Glenn was almost attacked later that night by members of the group from Buffalo, New York, when they saw him having a drink with Anna in the bar).<sup>7</sup> It was at this point that the lies written in the programme really began to bear fruit. An admittedly strange fruit, but fruit nonetheless. There was no doubt that these spectators fully believed in the invented relationships, and that this belief had informed the ways in which they viewed the work.

I have written earlier in this documentation of my cynicism with regard to 'invisible theatre' as a tool for social change, but as a theatrical device, and *in this instance*, it was effective, and, as such, successful. The lies had been told in order to see whether an audience would believe what they read for no better reason than that those lies were being offered in a 'truthful' form. If the experience of *At Last Sight* in Liege stands in any way as 'evidence' - and I believe that it does - then the work is opening up possibilities for interventions that I had never, prior to this project, even considered. I can tell the truth in performance and the form makes that truth read as a lie; I can tell lies in the programme and that form makes those lies read as truth. The potential for future projects is immense. For anybody interested in truth and lies (and how can any of us make art and not be?) then this

intervention provides a frame within which a seemingly endless series of explorations can be made. For if we are able to subvert and displace the idea of certainty even before the spectators take their seats, then perhaps we are more able to tell the truth about the lies of performance than if we were to perpetuate the belief that the world beyond the performance is somehow fixed and factual.

30-3-99

#### 4: Chris Roberts.

Chris has travelled further as a performer than anybody else in the group has. His early rehearsals showed him to be nervous and shy. He was always hugely aware of being watched and his eyes would flicker towards those of the watcher(s) in order to see if he was being regarded with approval. We spoke at some length about this. I have worked with Chris on a production of *Road* in his first year at Chester, and was aware of this aspect of his performative behaviour in advance of commencing work on *At Last Sight*. In many ways, it was Chris's incessant looking towards the spectator that led to *At Last Sight* being presented in the manner that it presently is. We could never have operated with some principle of 'fourth wall' *mimesis*, simply because Chris would inevitably peep through that wall and out at the watchers.

There was never going to be any question of naturalistic acting as such, but had Chris *not* been a member of the group (and I feel able to write these words because I am so pleased that he *is*) then I may well have considered a style of presentation which amounted to less of a two-way gazing.



Because Chris speaks the first substantial section of text, and because the text and its delivery comprises an invitation to the audience to 'believe' in the words of the performance even as those same words are quite obviously quoted, his ability to strike an appropriate tone is important. Playing to an audience which was made up in considerable part of non-English speakers made that 'tone' even more important than it might be when *At Last Sight* is presented in Chester. To my mind, Chris dealt with this first section very well indeed. He may have been nervous (and I suspect that he was) but what nerves were there were disguised. There was an authority to his performance here, which settled my own nerves as much, I think, as his own and those of his peers.

Of the four men in the group, Chris is possessed of the most 'honest' and engaging appearance. What I mean by this is that his face and manner seem open and without guile. He is blond, whereas the other men are dark, so it may be that I am doing no more here than enforcing a stereotype: one, which favours northern European, looks over those of the Mediterranean. Perhaps so. Whatever the origins of this prejudice, it does appear to be the case that there is a common association between darkness and danger. Where Glenn Robertson has dark stubble, Laurent Ruggeri has an olive complexion and Andrew Proudfoot has deep black and sinister-looking eyebrows, Chris is extremely pale-skinned. He looks innocent. Without wishing to perpetuate this idea of appearances as being in any way accurate barometers of nature, within *performance* it is clearly standard practice so to do. Heroes are handsome and heroines beautiful. Any deviations from this only serve to highlight the narrowness of our usual expectations. I suspect that the way Chris looks has more than a little to do with the plausibility



of his performance. One's first instinct may well be to trust the performer and then to carry that trust through to that which is being performed.

The nature of Chris's contribution to *At Last Sight* is such that he appears to be claiming the events as his own. He begins the piece and he ends it. There is a type of framing here, which means that the 'story', such as it is, plays as though it is a re-staging of his memory. The fact that Sarah Robertson was sitting and weeping throughout the performance, and the manner in which Chris interacted with her, only served to add to this illusion. From my perspective, this resulted in an engrossing relationship ... one which the spectator was fully privy to, and one which made 'sense' when viewed after reading the programme. This meant that *At Last Sight* was able to play with a core of perceived meaning ... at least 50% of which was impossible to predict prior to the reconfiguration of Sarah's role.

Chris handled his moments of 'dialogue' with the audience comfortably and was credible throughout. He adapted well to the need to re-invent certain sections now that Sarah Robertson was no longer active in the piece. His only real moment of weakness came at the end of *At Last Sight*. He was speaking lines which described a scene in a film by Werner Fassbinder (one which Chris has certainly never seen) and we had rehearsed this so that Chris continued to speak for a few seconds after the on-stage lights were taken down by Glenn Robertson. At the time that the lights were dimmed, Chris was concluding the description of a character's costume. The rehearsed words were: 'He has a long coat.' At this point, Chris should have continued speaking into the darkness. Whether he improvised the words or used the ones he had rehearsed was unimportant, as long as they



sounded appropriate. What Chris did was to stop speaking as soon as the lights went off. What he said was: 'He had a long ...' Clearly, this was not what was required.

No real damage was caused by this. I groaned inwardly, though I heard no chuckles or suchlike from the audience - and the applause that followed was both impressive and sustained - but I was disappointed that Chris was able to make such a naïve error. In all, however, this was of little or no consequence. What matters is that I was both pleased and proud with his overall contribution, and am looking forward to seeing how we can develop his performance over the coming weeks leading up to our performance in the Molloy Auditorium at University College Chester.

Inevitably, this development will include some sort of recognition of his relationship with Sarah Robertson. In one way or another it is something which he cannot ignore. Chris is engaged to be married, with the date set for August of this year. Knowing Chris and Sarah as I do, I am expecting him to either resist his feelings for Sarah or else confess all to his girlfriend. Similarly, Sarah does not strike me as someone who would be prepared to engage in an illicit and part-time relationship. Whatever they do will impact on the work. If Chris resists or denies his feelings for Sarah, or if Sarah chooses to maintain a distance between herself and Chris then his girlfriend will be coming to see *At Last Sight* in Chester. This could result in Chris and Sarah wanting to pull back from the sort of close physical contact with each other which is currently central to the performance. If he embraces his new feelings (his new relationship) and subsequently comes clean

with his girlfriend (I know her name, but do not really feel comfortable making her identity public, even within the narrow readership of this thesis) then that on-stage contact may become even closer. If I am reading Chris and Sarah incorrectly, and they conduct an affair in 'secret', then we the group will be made complicit in that deceit.

There is a type of honour in both Sarah and Chris which augurs against that happening. Honour is a difficult word to use in this context, but I do not feel that it is inappropriate. I do not see either Chris or Sarah being comfortable with lies.

Something will have to give.

**1-4-99**

#### **5: Andrew Proudfoot.**

Andrew is a quirky performer. There is an unpredictable quality to his work, an edginess, which keeps me watching. He also looks quirky. He has an animated face, which seems even more pronounced because the rest of the members of the cast are fairly deadpan. There is an energy in him.

It is in no way intended as an attack or a slight to say that, as an actor, Andrew has his limitations. The Drama Department at Chester does not provide vocational actor training, and the institution is not a *conservatoire*. There have been times in rehearsal when Andrew has been a little too keen to 'act', in the sense of wanting to create moments where he would be seen to show something of his range. A by-product of the way we work (and the way we do not work) at Chester is that students are not always aware of how little they (and we) can actually do.



Accordingly, one element of our work as directors of performance is to protect students from their own excesses and conceits. Sometimes it seems as though this is our main task: to make work which is as much about disguising inadequacies (again, our own as much as our students) as it is about providing a platform for credible skills. At one point in rehearsals, Andrew wanted to perform a soliloquy from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. I cannot recall now what it was that started Andrew off on this quest, but it grew into something of a quiet obsession. For three weeks, Andrew would turn up to rehearsals with a paperback copy of *Macbeth* in his pocket and every time we would reach a point of not knowing where to go with *At Last Sight* he would suggest one speech or another from that play. No amount of reasoning on my part would convince Andrew that a section of *Macbeth* would enhance neither *At Last Sight* nor Andrew's own grade. Ultimately, Andrew ran out of steam and his copy of *Macbeth* was returned to his shelf.

In performance in Liege, Andrew was strong. He functions as almost a dark twin to the clean-cut persona of Chris Roberts, providing the work with an air of predatory sexuality. When he thrusts his pelvis suggestively, in response to a description of a non-existent Fassbinder film, *Too Naughty to Say No*, there is something base-looking in Andrew himself, which works well with the acted movements. The scene would be radically different with, for example, Laurent moving in the same way. If anything, I feel as though we should counter this with some moments of vulnerability, because as it stands, Andrew is too obviously representative of libido, whereas Chris's actions, words and demeanour seem to speak to the spectator of love. Perhaps the recognition of this will lead to a way in which Andrew can display the 'range' he so seeks.

His weakest scene is the one with Anna Garnett, although, as I have already mentioned, I believe that the fault here lay more with Anna than with Andrew. For the rest of the piece, Andrew was on good form, and I have no reason to consider changing what he does, other than to provide him with more opportunities to explore the more sentimental side of his nature.

In terms of the structure of *At Last Sight*, there is a pedestrian quality to too much of the work and it is Andrew who seems most able and likely to alter that. He appears to be moving quickly even when he is no faster than the rest of the group. If pace is to come from any individual, then that individual will almost certainly be Andrew. What needs to be guarded against is the temptation to have Andrew running riot whilst the movements of the rest of the cast remain ponderous. Notwithstanding my comments about appearance, it has never been my intention that different performers should embody different 'types'. I do not want Andrew to appear as though he is in a different piece to the others any more than I want to limit his role to that of the Mr. Hyde to Chris's Dr. Jekyll.

The way that the group looks, both individually and collectively, is important. Sarah Skelton, for example, plays a section where she approaches a male spectator in the audience and the 'success' of that scene is in part at least determined by her level of attractiveness. So I am not trying to negate or work against the physical impression which Andrew or any other member of the cast is capable of presenting. Rather, I am interested in the ways in which a working against the



ease with which he can play 'dirty' or 'dark' might make those moments which already exist seem darker still.

I am expecting Andrew to do well when we perform in Chester, even better than he performed in Liege. He is a popular student, a keen Elvis Presley on Karaoke nights, (he has been nicknamed 'King' by the cast) and he enjoys playing in front of friends. There is a sly humour to his work, a knowing look, which I am excited about seeing when at least some of the spectators are also his friends. Because I know that Andrew is romantically interested in a fellow student (not a member of this cast), I know that he is regarding our production of *At Last Sight* at Chester as a means of performing to her. He has told me this, with a disarming and disconcerting honesty. He sees *At Last Sight* as a deeply seductive work, and is hoping that some of that seductive nature will influence the object of his desire.

I have no objections to *At Last Sight* being seen or used in this way. If Andrew wants to regard the work as an aid to a romantic encounter then he will do so whatever I think or feel. As with the issue of Chris Roberts and Sarah Robertson, I feel no moral responsibility for the behaviour of the cast. I am their tutor but not their guardian. If they work well and hard on the project then I am pleased. Anything else that they choose to do is their own concern.

## **6: Sarah Skelton.**

Sarah's contribution to *At Last Sight* has always been strong. Whilst she would make no claims to being a performer of significant range, she is possessed of a discernible presence, aligned to a quiet confidence and a willingness to put the

needs of the production above any desire she might have to achieve a high grade. This has been a constant feature of her work. Some two months ago, I suggested to Sarah that she use sign-language throughout the production and, whilst this was something which the rest of the cast were set against, Sarah herself was quite happy to go along with the idea. Complaints from other students that her assessment would inevitably suffer as a consequence of her not speaking (which were always unfounded and incorrect) did not alter Sarah's intentions. Ultimately, the sign-idea looked unconvincing in rehearsal, and it was subsequently reduced to a very short section towards the start of the piece.

For Sarah, the process has always been both significant and enjoyable ... an end in itself as much as it has been a means. She is currently engaged in a dissertation on postmodern performance, as is Chris Roberts, both of whom are being supervised by a colleague of mine. Accordingly, her interest in the rationale behind *At Last Sight* is strong. She is an informed and popular member of the group.

In terms of her performance, Sarah has perhaps three moments, which stand out. She addresses the audience directly, explaining that she will be speaking in sign-language for part of the performance, and that this is a 'theatrical device'; she delivers a description of the female orgasm, in the manner of a lecture; and she engages in a whispered dialogue with a male spectator.

The section relating to the orgasm is perhaps the easiest one to deal with, as it is the most overtly theatrical of the three moments. Sarah's delivery was such that it



appeared to hold the audience, even those members for whom English was not a comprehensible language. There was a flatness to this scene, which was not of Sarah's making. Despite intentions to the contrary, there are too many moments in *At Last Sight* - and this is one of them - when there is too little happening at any one time. In this case, that means that when Sarah is speaking the rest of the cast members seem to defer to her 'moment' and remain still for fear of upstaging. We have talked about this in rehearsal, and the problem is mine rather than the cast members'. We need to find some action that will provide the scene with a visual quality to offset the static nature of Sarah's speech. It is as though we are still clinging, subconsciously, to a cultural disinclination towards anything that might be regarded as 'scene-stealing', even when we know that a complex, overlapping and sometimes deliberately disruptive montage is precisely what the work most requires.

It is a strange feature of performance-making that inadequacies in the work can go unnoticed prior to public performance; so that seeing the work as part of an audience is almost like seeing it for the first. This was certainly the case in Liege. I watched Sarah driving this scene and was pleased with her work at the same time as I was wondering how we could have failed to notice the spaces around her. Too much space and too little action. The fact that it is such an easy problem to resolve only adds to my feelings of directorial naivety.

Sarah's sign-language section was performed as well as it had been in rehearsal. It is tempting to say that it was better, but the distance between the 'then' of rehearsals and (if not quite the 'now') the more recent 'then' of Liege is not great

enough for me to make that judgement with any accuracy. Certainly, playing to an audience helped the performers, just as it enabled me to see the work as part of a collective. But to suggest that certain performances were radically enhanced by the presence of spectators would be to buy in too heavily to one of the abiding myths of theatre. The performers presented the work as they had rehearsed it ... with the obvious proviso of having to work around the 'absence' of Sarah Robertson. Nothing 'magical' happened through the presence of an audience. All that we can say that it did was provide a focus for the actions and words. In this way, the effectiveness of Sarah Skelton's delivery was made more apparent here than it could have been in rehearsal. The audience watched and listened (or appeared to) and perhaps that again is all that we can say.

As a director, one engages in a series of guesses. It is the same with any art. Choices are made in the hope that they will hang together and make a kind of aesthetic sense to the viewer/receiver. Just as in writing these words now I am guessing that a sense will be transmitted to the reader. The more one writes, the better one's guesses become ... or at least that would seem like a fair assumption. The more one directs performance, the more effective those directorial judgements might be. It is a flawed premise; because we know that work is not made on the steadily upward spiral that would exist if such was always the case. Nevertheless, the premise is logical in a way that makes it difficult to ignore. The greater the control of technique, the greater the probability that this same technique will facilitate an enhanced process of communication.



2-4-99

There is an awkwardly negotiated line between the benefits of experience and the perils of the clichéd and the formulaic. Those of us who make work regularly will be aware of the temptation to succumb to the regurgitation of previous ideas rather than the invention of new strategies. This is not to suggest that drawing on previous experience is wrong. For how could such be the case? But it is an attempt to highlight some of the problems that experience can bring. What worked once before is by no means guaranteed to work again; which does not always prevent us from integrating the 'good bits' of the past into the spaces where new ideas might otherwise bear fruit. My own predilection towards stillness and silence - which is perhaps no more *now* than a searching for the emulation of previous 'successes' *via* previous techniques - has led me to an economy of action, which in this case is working against the production as a whole. It is an area I need to address as soon as the cast reconvenes in Chester.

Sarah's most complex moment is probably the one where she initiates a dialogue with a male spectator. What happens is that Sarah is seated in an extremely down stage position, almost touching the audience. She will have made a decision earlier on in the work about which spectator she will address, and this has influenced the position she takes up at this point. Whilst other members of the cast are presenting action and dialogue on stage, Sarah begins to whisper to a male spectator.<sup>8</sup> She asks him why he is watching her rather than the performance *per se*. She asks whether he likes looking at her. She tells him she has noticed that he has been watching her. The words and the delivery are overtly flirtatious. In fact, the words are no more than a development of an earlier section where Sarah has

asked the audience whether they think that her lips are painted red for their collective gaze. Structurally, the only difference here is that the spectator is alone and is made complicit in that gaze: it is being returned. Emotionally there are a great many differences. Sarah is an attractive young woman. She is aware that she is exploiting this in this scene and is comfortable with the complexities of speaking in these whispered tones to a male stranger. The fact that this stranger may well not understand any of Sarah's words should not diminish the effectiveness of the encounter. It is loaded with whispered intimacy and invitation.

It is perhaps a crude means of playing with notions of the gaze. It came about, like much of *At Last Sight* has, by accident. During one rehearsal, Sarah was sitting on the floor in a down stage position when she began whispering to me. The words were only whispered because other members of the cast were still performing and Sarah did not wish to upset their concentration. The words themselves were inconsequential: Sarah was asking if she could leave the space to make a pre-arranged phone call to a letting agent. Two things were interesting. The first was that I felt drawn into the world of the performance by the initiation of a dialogue with one of the cast whilst the rest of the performance continued. It was as though I were no longer invisible, which was a strange realisation, because we had never been operating with any notion of the 'fourth wall'. Whispering my own response to Sarah only served to enhance this feeling of participation ... of a being in at the same time as a being out.



The second was that I was made aware of the intimacy of whispers within a public space. There was nothing salacious about the content of our dialogue, yet the form imbued it with a kind of secret sharing. In terms of performance this is exciting because within a whispered relationship there is the possibility for empathy born of a primarily somatic engagement. The body can fool the mind. As an example of this we can say that if performer **A** were to prod performer **B** in the chest repeatedly there is a possibility that performer **B** would become angry, even though s/he is aware that performer **A** is only acting. The body's responses can over-rule the more reasoned responses of the mind. In this way, Sarah's whispering to a stranger might lead to an emotional engagement on his part. This engagement would exist in spite of the fact that he would know, logically, that the words were either part of a prepared text or else were negated by the context within which they were being uttered.

This may not amount to a 'legitimate' working through of the idea. Certainly, I grasped the idea almost as it came with little thought of any problematic consequences. Fortunately, there were no problems with this section in Liege. According to Sarah (I was too far away to bear reliable witness to the exchange) the spectator, a Belgian male in his thirties who spoke English well, responded to her words with whispers of his own. He said that yes, indeed, he had been watching Sarah more than any of the others, and that yes, he was enjoying looking at her very much. According to Sarah and also to other members of the group, this same spectator spent the remaining fifty minutes following Sarah with his eyes, ignoring everything else that occurred on stage.

3-4-99

I am able to trace this interest I have in on-stage whispers to a production of *A Winter's Tale* at the Everyman Theatre, Liverpool in 1987. Before the performance could begin, the director came out on the stage and addressed the audience. She told us that the actress playing the part of Paulina had lost her voice and would have to whisper the part. The audience duly applauded this spirit of 'The Show Must Go On'. When the character of Paulina first spoke, and indeed she did so in a whisper, I was drawn in to her words to a much greater degree than had she proclaimed them in the manner (and at the level) of the rest of the cast. The words carried easily. No sounds came from the audience and the acoustics of the space ensured that every word was clearly heard. After a few moments, the actors sharing scenes with Paulina (the performer's name escapes me) began to moderate their own voices until before long every performer in the cast was whispering.

I did not particularly enjoy the 'play'. The direction did not impress me and the set, costumes and actors were ordinary. Had it not been for the whispers I suspect that I would have forgotten the experience almost as soon as the evening had passed. As it was, it remains one of the most powerful examples of theatre I have ever witnessed. Years later, when watching a production of *Othello* at the Young Vic Theatre, I can remember aching for some of the unplanned for whispered restraint of the Everyman *Winter's Tale*. Willard Whyte, as Othello, bellowing his speech over the dead Desdemona as though he were shouting instructions across a parade ground and in a high wind had little to offer. When the audience had been invited to listen attentively in Liverpool we had done so. We had listened in the



way that one listens to conversations through a hotel wall. The fainter the words the greater our urgency to hear. There had been more intimacy, more sharing and more engagement in that straining to hear than in any of the Young Vic projection.

Whispers then have long been an aesthetic device I have wished to utilise. The intimate nature of *At Last Sight* has allowed me to explore this aesthetic without feeling that the device is either arbitrary or ill conceived. Again, it is a guess. What works for or appeals to me may not work for an audience. It will certainly not work for all members of an audience. As ever, all that one can do is make guesses based on the blend of judgement, experience and instinct that we each carry with us. If a whisper is also possessed of a certain filmic quality, of an eavesdropping on the part of the spectator, then that too is appropriate to *At Last Sight*, which has always been driven by a sensibility born of a love of film.

Three years ago, I performed at the Spiel Art Festival in Munich in a production of Insomniac Productions' *Clare de Luz*. The work, directed by Pete Brooks, was concerned with theatre-as-film; or, to be more accurate, with the construction of a theatrical event which would result in a similar experience to watching a film. The structure was one of jump cuts, swift shifts in perspective and lip-synching to a soundtrack presented in surround-sound stereo. The production was successful on many levels, receiving critical acclaim and playing to a number of appreciative audiences. As a performer drafted in for the dates at Spiel Art only I can take a share in none of this credit, and mention it here only as a means of acknowledging the achievements of Insomniac's creative team.

*Clare de Luz* was a production of significance to myself. It had impressed me hugely when I had seen it, and I enjoyed the experience of performing in the piece when I did. What it has not done is make *At Last Sight* any easier to create. In this way its significance has not functioned as a liberating device. Where *Clare de Luz* seemed comfortably *sui generis* *At Last Sight* seems derivative. I realise that this is because I am aware of my own influences to a greater degree than those of Brooks. That which seems effortless and original within *Clare de Luz* is born out of the same world of memory and influence as *At Last Sight* ... the difference is that Brooks' influences are hidden from view (from *my* view at least) in a way that my own are not.

The unqualified success of *Clare de Luz* made the initial processes of creating *At Last Sight* even more difficult than might otherwise have been the case. Whereas Insomniac Productions had utilised a filmic form with what amounted to a highly theatrical, not to say melodramatic, content, we were attempting with *At Last Sight* to achieve something of the feel of film without recourse to any cinematic devices. Just the opposite in fact, because *At Last Sight* opens itself up to a multitude of viewing perspectives which are the stuff of live theatre and the antithesis of film. This has resulted in an incessant self-doubting. A doubting which has been much more pronounced than is usual for me. It feels as though I am chasing a cinematic ideal at the same time as my brief experience of *Clare de Luz* has served a dual and perhaps even a negative purpose. It exists as a paradigm, which I cannot realistically expect to match, and it also denies me the possibility of using a more overt film-form precisely because to do so would



result in a feeling of aesthetic plagiarism. Even if those feelings were not recognised by the cast or any spectators.

This is not to suggest that I would like to wipe *Clare de Luz* from my memory. It is more a case of something that I have come to regard as a landmark production haunting *At Last Sight* by dint of its own internal and performative coherence. It is in the nature of influence that that which inspires us most has competencies that are also so tantalisingly beyond our reach.

4-4-99

#### 7: Elizabeth Hague.

Elizabeth is the most accomplished performer of the group. The rest of the group members recognise this. She has a strong emotional range, can be by turns inviting and forbidding, and is the only member of the cast who seems ready, at this stage, to work with a professional company. She is the performer whom my colleagues in the Drama Department would most wish to be a member of their groups, and, as such, is a great boon to *At Last Sight*.<sup>9</sup>

Watching the work in Liege, I was aware of how little Elizabeth is being asked to do. She speaks a section early on, which is one of a series of 'introductions' to the piece; she plays an Arabella and Paris scene with Glenn Robertson and she describes a non-existent David Lynch film. Because she is capable of a level of performance that is greater than her peers are, there is a temptation to give her more to do than them. Trying to read *At Last Sight* as a spectator, meant that I wanted to see more of Elizabeth ... as a director and tutor, I have to balance this with considerations of parity within the cast. This is most important perhaps in

terms of my role as a tutor. The role carries with it an obligation of care to each of the students. They are each deserving, through their status as students, of the same opportunities for learning and for presenting the evidence of that learning ... in this instance *via* performance. The simple fact that Elizabeth appears capable of performing at a level beyond that of her peers in no way legitimises a situation where the process is loaded in her favour. By this I mean that this project will not succumb to the temptation to create 'star' parts for 'star' players.

At times, this can result in difficult decisions. With a taught programme such as the one at University College Chester, where no consideration of process is afforded to Drama students, assessment becomes a case of the point arrived at rather than the distance travelled. According to our assessment criteria, each of the students begins at a common level. A gifted student will receive high marks for the production of good quality work, even when that work has been produced without any considerable effort on the student's part. I have no problems with this. Good work is good work and it seems appropriate that it should be rewarded thus. The problem comes when a student who is perhaps weaker in terms of technique works twice as hard to produce work of a similar quality to that produced by his or her more gifted peer. My instincts tell me that this student should be rewarded more handsomely ... although I am aware that there are flaws to this argument. For instance, if one were to operate this procedure with practical work, why not also do the same with written assignments, where marks for 'process' are rarely, if ever, argued for?



Notwithstanding this, it seems unfair that work, which may go unseen in performance in front of an audience, is not credited in assessment. The fact that Elizabeth has worked diligently throughout rehearsals, contributing a number of key ideas and, no less importantly, raising the performance-levels of the rest of the cast through her own efforts, *should* be both acknowledged and rewarded. By the same token, I could argue that, at least at this point in time, Chris Roberts and Sarah Robertson (despite my problems with her in Liege) have travelled further as performers than the rest of the group, whilst Sarah Skelton has been perhaps the most constructively and consistently unselfish. None of this will be taken into consideration in assessment. The students will be marked solely on an assessment of their performances on the night or nights that *At Last Sight* is seen by members of the department.

There is nothing Elizabeth does in performance that is weak. I could write here a list of her qualities, but this would serve to shift the chapter away from its aim. What matters is that she performed admirably and, if possible, and without upsetting either the balance of *At Last Sight* or the balance of the group, I would like to see her do more. To this end, and once again, Anna Garnett's decision to leave the group may well serve as something of a gift to the remaining cast. Anna, I should say, has by now left Chester and is back at her home in the North East, with her studies suspended until such time as she negotiates some package of distance learning or re-attendance. The dividing up of Anna's role between the remaining members of the group will inevitably provide further opportunities for Elizabeth. I am happier with this than with the idea of creating an abundance of new material. *At Last Sight* was solid enough in performance for me to be

confident in the work as it currently stands. I am aware of what has sometimes been an over-willingness on my part to make quite radical alterations to work when that work might be better served by polishing that which already exists. I need to maintain this awareness throughout the crucial few weeks that remain between now and the presentations of *At Last Sight* in Chester.

**5-4-99**

Anke Sauthof and Laurent Ruggeri did everything that could be expected of them after such a brief time as members of the group. In terms of their performances, Laurent's movements have a ponderous quality, which suits the thematics of *At Last Sight*, whilst doing little to offer hope of any accelerated pace. Anke moves like a dancer. She is dance-trained and this shows in everything she does. She is intelligent and has grasped very quickly the nature of the work, but physically she is prone to movements and the adoption of positions that are considerably more stylised than anything else on show within the piece. Her feet shift, almost by their own volition, into dance positions, and any gestures she makes have the grace of dance rather than the inelegance required for much of *At Last Sight*. We have talked about this, and I have asked her not to 'prettify' the work. All that is required is concentration and the breaking of habits, which her previous training has made into a type of instinct.

**6-4-99**

Something which both Anke and Laurent bring in addition to their rehearsed contributions as performers, are their nationalities. This lends a European feel to *At Last Sight*, which is more than a mere nod towards an anti-parochialism. Text spoken in foreign languages brings something else to the work. One of the ideas for performance which has stayed with me for fifteen years (it was spoken by one



of my tutors during my final year on an undergraduate programme) is of characters who have everything to say and nobody to speak to, and of characters who are surrounded by others yet have nothing to say. I think it is as a (somewhat muddled) response to this that I am drawn towards words on stage which have meaning, but where that meaning is lost in the space between the speaker and the listener. It allows the work to be both literal and obscure; to be meaningful and meaningless at one and the same time. In performance-making terms it is no more than another guess. I am guessing that this will read as more than simply a collection of languages; more than the random configuration of student-performers with different levels of bi-linguality.

**11-4-99**

In writing these words, I am coming to realise that these guesses are really wishes dressed up as strategies. They are hopes and very little more: and in this they are at least as optimistic as they are informed. That this is the nature of creating work does not make its realisation any easier to accept. It makes the creation of performance more of a lottery than I would normally care to admit. The very absence of any 'rules' of success, which makes the commencement of each project such an exciting leap in the dark, is the same thing that leads to experienced practitioners feeling every bit as vulnerable as the new. We move bodies in space and time and light, and sometimes give them words to speak, in the hope that something of our original intentions will find a way to speak to strangers seated in the dark. We play – or I am playing here – with issues of redemption towards a decidedly unstable end. The spectators of *At Last Sight* no more share my world-view than I feel any desire to make a work that seeks to

show them how to think. Which makes the construction of the work seem somehow shallow and without purpose.

12-4-99

I can recognise these doubts as a direct consequence of reflective analysis. In tracing my intentions thus I am also inevitably recalling something of my fears. When a project has no clear function other than as an example of an 'interesting' way of making work, then there are times when one's faith in the interest of spectators is stretched too thin to bear. With *At Last Sight* – as a performance-project rather than as a subject for my own written analysis – the absence of any obvious function places an almost intolerable weight on the success of the work according to purely aesthetic criteria. When there is no 'message' all that can remain is the hope – or at best, the *belief* – that the work will be sustained through the internal logic of its own construction ... that the aesthetic qualities displayed will be enough to make an audience attend.

There is a Catch-22 in my own argument here ... which exposes my concerns as no more than a wishing for protection *via* the very criteria for theatre as a tool for social reform that I am resolutely disinclined towards. For whereas issue-based dramas can take solace in the assumed worthiness of their causes, be they stated or implied, work such as *At Last Sight* has no such safety net. Offering audiences no more or less than an 'interesting take' on performance, the project almost invites criticisms of esoteric and elitist self-indulgence.

There is a perversity to my mood now, as we enter what are the final stages of making the work. Liege was a success, according to my own terms and



expectations. The piece went well, the cast pulled together and the response from spectators was sufficient to make the entire group feel a genuine confidence about the project.

This last point is an interesting one, because the words spectators offer to makers of performances are not always accurate responses. I know this to be so by the dishonesty of many of my own post-performance comments to actors, directors, dancers, musicians and writers. To say that a spectator enjoyed any given production is an impossible claim to support: the comments made by spectators are simply not sufficient to be afforded the status of evidence or proof. Notwithstanding this, we continue to believe the good things that we hear from spectators, just as we seek to discredit and dismiss the bad. A desperate triumph of hope over experience.

The lies we told in our programmes served their purpose, and indeed exceeded our expectations in an entirely positive way. The work contained an interesting blend of the at-risk and the well rehearsed. We are left with enough time in Chester to work through any changes we feel necessary, and all is set-fair for performances in May. The absence of Anna Garnett is unlikely to disadvantage the piece and should in fact provide opportunities for other members of the group to develop their current roles without upsetting such structure as already exists. Why then these self-doubts? I suspect that they are nothing more than the usual concerns, exaggerated here by their inclusion in a written documentation. Under 'normal' circumstances, by which I mean the making of a project with students, which would not be accompanied by a written discourse, there would be precious little

time for such doubts to emerge. Other tasks take up other times and any concerns that do exist would be reconciled in the rehearsal space rather than at the desk. This does not mean that a process of reflective documentation is to be avoided. I have no doubts that *At Last Sight* is and will be a better and richer piece of work than would have been the case if the 'making' were not so closely aligned with reflection and explanation. But the process is draining. It provides no respite: one is rehearsing or else one is writing.

14-4-99

The result of this is a concentration that borders on the obsessive. At the same time as I write these words, during the Easter Vacation of 1999, I am also preparing to travel to the United States, in order to teach on an exchange programme at the University of New York State. This is one element of a long-standing arrangement. On the one hand then, I am looking forward to a break from *At Last Sight*, on the other, I am unhappy at the separation. The project has been such a central part of my thinking and doing for so long that to leave it behind for five weeks (three weeks during Easter and then two in upstate New York) seems like an overlong absence. The members of the cast have agreed to meet at their usual times and so the work will have inevitably altered by the time I return. This also accounts for an element of the trepidation I currently feel. The process of constructing *At Last Sight* has been genuinely collaborative. It has been so in ways that have not been evidenced in any project I have previously led, and I am proud and pleased of the manner in which the entire group has made the work thus far. It is in an acknowledgement rather than denial of this that I am able to recognise a coming to the surface at this point of a hitherto concealed craving for power.



A consequence of the performance in Liege was that the cast felt an ownership of *At Last Sight*. Any doubts they may have harboured as to the ways in which the work would be read seemed to be allayed by experience of performing the work in public and by the immediate and subsequent responses of spectators. They feel now as though the work is *theirs*. I feel threatened here by the very thing that I have so strenuously sought to achieve, and which the group has so clearly attained. I am not happy with the idea of myself as an autocrat, although I realise that this is an articulation of the way I feel. This makes me wonder whether I have only been seeking the *illusion* of collaboration, whilst secretly (as a secret even to myself?) wanting to maintain a directorial control which would subjugate the cast to the status of breathing puppets. Certainly, a part of my antipathy towards the idea of visiting America at this time (something I have been looking forward to all year) is connected to the fear of letting *At Last Sight* pass out of my hands. If I were to ask myself now how real are my fears that this relocation will be manifest in the work being substantially changed by the time I return, then the answer would be 'I do not know'.

What I do know is that I trust the group. I have every faith in their individual and collective abilities to develop the work constructively; which leaves me with the bleak realisation that any concerns I have are not for *At Last Sight* as much as for myself. That I care less about the changes they may make to the work than the ways they may change how they care about me.

I do not think that the cast members are aware of this, and I hope that they are not. It was not something that I was aware of until such time as I sat down and wrote the words preceding these. I wonder whether a part of this is tied in with the feelings I often have of anti-climax when I see work I have directed being performed. I say this not because the work itself fails to match up to my hopes or expectations (that it singularly does so is another issue altogether) so much as because a part of me is sitting in the audience and envying the performers. This envy is not connected to the quality or otherwise of the work they are in; nor is it because I regard myself as an actor *manqué*. The envy exists, I think, because the work is passing out of my hands and into theirs. The pleasures ordinarily felt by performers during and immediately after a performance only serve to highlight the emptiness of this director's role. One becomes redundant after so many weeks or months of being in a position of control.

This may leave me with no alternative to the idea that a function of creating *At Last Sight* has been, for me, a means of satisfying some desire for control. Perhaps then the issues of catharsis, which I raised and then dismissed in so peremptory a fashion in the early sections of this thesis, are being met by this exercising of control. Rather than seeking to hide from this in shame, perhaps I should simply be acknowledging it as an inevitable aspect of performance-making and as a (presumably) constructive and (hopefully) harmless means of giving vent to that which might otherwise emerge in everyday life. Whatever the wider ramifications, I am still left with the feeling that I have been deluding myself as to too many of the reasons behind embarking on the project of *At Last Sight*. It concerns me that much of that which has felt good through the giving away has been no more than



a sham. It is actually twice as false as it first appears, because in the first instance, my feelings of collaboration have disguised a number of submerged but no less strong feelings of control, and in the second I have never really given the work away. I am clinging to the work precisely *because* the project provides me with the tools for controlling the group.

We can go two ways with this. I can either accept this desire for control as something which exists and that can itself be made subject to control; or else I regard it as something invidious and beyond restraint. Because this thesis has been driven from the start by a reading of what *is* rather than by that which might *otherwise be* ... by a commitment to working with the givens of the specific experience of making *this* work, at *this* time and with *this* group, it would be illogical to bemoan the situation. The flip-side of an interest in heuristics, of the process of research being as concerned with the researcher's developing knowledge of the self as it is with a knowledge of the subject, is that this 'self' may not be the type one would wish to discover. Notwithstanding this, the recognition of any given aspect of my own behaviour would only be more or less 'good' than any other if this thesis were concerned with the valuing of self. Recognising my self as one of the elements of *At Last Sight* means that I am also a subject for the study that is this thesis ... even *the* subject. Which is not the same thing as turning the thesis into a value-judgement as to my own worth. To recognise it, to read it and to be able to make judgements as to the impact it may be having on the work is one thing, to seek to subvert it simply because the process of reflection has unearthed it is another thing entirely.

It may be that the distance provided by a vacation and then an exchange is exactly what *At Last Sight* needs. I may need a rest from the project, just as the project may need a rest from me. My absence over the two weeks that the group will be working without me is inevitable. The changes they implement during this period will become part of the fabric of the work and, as a consequence, will inform this thesis.

It is interesting to note that despite the fact that the group will now be working without me for only two weeks, whereas Anna Garnett has gone for good, it is my own absence that I am writing about. A part of this is surely that I always regarded Anna as the most peripheral of the core members of the group, and also that she was the weakest in terms of performance. And yet, when my absence was known well in advance and Anna Garnett's was impossible to predict, one might have thought that it would be the impact of random which would be most heavily felt. That it is not probably says more about the nature of making work with groups than I would have anticipated. An awareness of the random is built into the process of performance, and we live and deal with it almost without thought. An artist can ensure that s/he does not run out of blue paint, whereas we cannot ensure that performer X will turn up for tomorrow's rehearsal, or even be on time for a scheduled performance. We function in a state of temporary facts, with no guarantee that the givens of today will approximate in any way to those we experience the next time that we meet.

**16-4-99**

The random and the unexpected. It seems now that *At Last Sight* will be given a life beyond Chester. An invitation has arrived from a university theatre festival,



'Festupic', in Compiègne, for *At Last Sight* to be presented in June. Further invitations have arrived from Utrecht, for a performance in June and from 'Arena', a festival of experimental theatre in Erlangen, for performances in July. I have already turned Arena down, because too many members of the cast have commitments for July, which would prevent them from travelling to Germany at the time of the festival. Participation at the festival in Compiègne and at Utrecht may be possible, although this would necessitate a degree of further funding from University College Chester, which experience tells me we would be unlikely to receive.

The invitations - which have come from people who saw *At Last Sight* in Liege – confirm my belief that the work has been successful in its only public performance to date. My feelings that the piece would be improved by a number of changes have not been altered, however, and I am expecting the work to be different in a number of ways by the time we next present the work in May.

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<sup>1</sup> McAuley, G. *The Video Documentation of Theatrical Performance* in 'New Theatre Quarterly' Vol. X No. 38, May 1994. p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* p.186.

<sup>3</sup> See *Theorising Video Practice*. Wayne, M. Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, London, 1997

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p. 189.

<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, I decided against including video evidence of the production in this thesis for precisely the reasons mentioned in this chapter's opening paragraphs. I did not wish the video footage to read as though what *remains* approximates absolutely to what *occurred*. (12-10-00)

<sup>6</sup> Anna Garnett will be as able as any other member of the group to access this thesis. My reservations stem from the fact that she has absented herself from the project, not from any comments I might make about her in these pages.

<sup>7</sup> Three of the students from Buffalo, two males and a female, became angry with Glenn. They voiced their criticism of his behaviour (as they saw it) and were abusive in their language. No threat of physical violence was made, but the atmosphere, by all accounts, was tense. This was witnessed by Anna, Andrew and Sarah Skelton (none of whom did anything to alter the American students' views). Glenn offered no excuses for his actions and the Buffalo group left that part of the bar. They then found Sarah Robertson, drinking with Chris Roberts and Liz Hague. At this point their tension faded. One of the male students told Sarah that she was better off without Glenn. Surprisingly, my own behaviour, in exploiting the Glenn and Sarah 'situation' was not mentioned at all.

<sup>8</sup> Sarah speaks only English, which meant that there was the possibility of her initiating a 'conversation' with someone who understood little or nothing of what she said. Sarah was aware of this. We felt that the tone in which she spoke, and the overall manner of the address, meant that the words themselves, whilst important, were not the *only* means by which she would be making herself understood.

<sup>9</sup> This is not an assumption. Colleagues working on other Level 3 productions have told me this.



## Chapter Five

7-5-99

This chapter will articulate key changes made to *At Last Sight* prior to its presentation at University College Chester and to offer an ongoing explanation of pertinent developments as and when they might occur. The performances at Chester themselves will be discussed only briefly. The fact that a broad address to the overall process undertaken will form the basis of the subsequent conclusion to this thesis will not prevent a number of summative ideas from emerging in this fifth (and possibly final) chapter.

As was described in Chapter Four, a number of changes from the presentation of *At Last Sight* in Liege are unavoidable. The cast is one down on this time six weeks ago and the need to alter the work has thus been imposed on the group. As ever, it seems, a certain *caveat* exists. There will be no easy distinction here between the process of revision through rehearsals and the process of evaluating the performance at University College Chester. In writing at the time of making there is a progression from one to the other, but this will not be articulated here under headings such as 'Revisions' and 'Evaluation' or 'Process' and 'Product'. Rather, the two will collapse in on each other even as I write.

There are certain 'givens' for the revised production: many elements that will not change. Thus, the process of revision is also always in part a process of projection. No matter how radical the changes to the piece may be, I have a firm idea now of how *At Last Sight* will emerge. I cannot isolate my developing familiarity with and understanding of the work from this period of re-evaluation

and revision. If *At Last Sight* were never to be performed again, I would still be able to make an assessment of it as a *thing done*. As a publicly presented event. This changes my role. I am no longer engaged entirely in a process towards an end, so much as I am moving from one realised end towards another. How it *was* is a part of my thinking now, in the same way that how it *will be* is

Changes in the spoken text can be identified through an examination of *At Last Sight* as it is in Appendix 8. The shifts in wording from the 'original' working script, through its transformations for Liege and on to the version for Chester will reveal to the reader much about the process of revision. The texts as shown in Appendix 8 are not records of what was spoken *in performance*, but that which was created in rehearsal. Much of the spoken text was deliberately inaudible, consisting of whispers between performers and from performers to spectators. In this way, no authoritative record of words spoken could ever exist. Increasingly, as the cast has come to regard the work as their own, they have been willing to provide verbal as well as physical ideas. Indeed, if there is an imbalance in terms of material, that imbalance now is even more noticeable in the ease with which the group is able to draw on a literary rather than a physical confidence. As such, rehearsals are still as prone to being word-bound now in early May as they were back in October of last year. The principle difference is that now we are aware of the changes that *need* to be made to *At Last Sight*, which is enabling us to force moments of movement, even at those times when we would all seem more comfortable with the further provision of words.



It is ironic that it is only now, when the work is being made for an exclusively English speaking audience, that we are beginning to make the work play with a visual coherence instead of a predominantly verbal one.

My 'concerns' that the group would change *At Last Sight* during my absence have proved unfounded. In fact, the group met regularly without altering the shape of the work in any discernible way. What they have done is to divide Anna's scenes up between themselves and to block these 'new' moments in. They have used their time constructively and *At Last Sight* does not seem rusty. There are more significant changes: three new elements have been introduced specifically as a consequence of the time I spent recently in America.

The first is a section of text, which has been written as a type of American B Movie dialogue. Sarah Skelton and Andrew Proudfoot will be performing this section, for no better reason than that they were the two members of the cast I saw first on my return. The dialogue, which is concerned with an encounter between a man and a woman, has not been constructed with any sense of which gender speaks which words. We will work that out in rehearsal. The text is written as follows:

A: Drink?  
B: Yes.  
A: Come and get it then.  
B: Oh I'll come and get it all right. I'll come and get the drink and I'll come and get you.  
A: So, where do we go from here then?  
B: Information you mean?  
A: That's right.  
B: Well, why don't you fire a question. Nothing too loaded.  
A: So I fall for a mystery?  
B: There's no mystery here. How fast do you fall?  
A: Too fast.  
B: It needs to be right on the first time and wrong on the last. There's nothing else to know.  
A: So, will you make love to me?  
B: Oh, I'll make love to you all right. But first, tell me what day it is.  
A: Tuesday.  
B: Well, we'll have to be quick. I'm due elsewhere by the weekend.  
A: Kiss me?  
B: Not in front of all these people.  
A: Why not?  
B: I'm more at ease without an audience.

**8-5-99**

I am making no claims as to the quality of the text as it reads. It is simplistic, even 'cod' dialogue. However, we have already begun to work the words into a scene, with Andrew and Sarah doing the bulk of this without any great interference from myself, and it seems as though the section is developing into a scene of some pace, energy and action. A drink is thrown, a kiss is attempted, an embrace is made and the performance space is used both intelligently and well.

The text was introduced because *At Last Sight* is suffering from an absence of encounters. It is as though we need to build more moments of dialogue into the work and take out some of the long(er) sections of monologue. Similarly, we need to exploit the possibility of physical contact between performers, which is made logical by the thematic structure of *At Last Sight* as at least partly concerned with a series of meetings between a man and a woman in a rented room. Without



physicalising these *meetings* between performers (perhaps I need to swallow the false pride of postmodernism and say ‘meetings between *characters*’) the audience may not be receiving enough identifiable elements for them to engage in a readerly process of deconstruction. Too little is being placed before them for any engagement to take place.

This feels (or at least it may sound) like capitulation. Like an admission on my part that spectators need straightforward elements of narrative in order to attend to performance. I know this not to be the case. If it is an admission of anything it is of my emerging recognition that whilst others may possess the necessary skills to make work that functions adequately without recourse to a structure of ‘story’, my own skills are not at this level. The capacity for recognition may be a useful component of analysis almost in itself. However, in terms of making performance, I am still faced with the challenge of developing *At Last Sight* into the best work that it can be, and of doing this in the realisation that my own best may not always be quite good enough.

The way in which I am making an assessment as to the ‘needs’ of the production is no less a process of guess work now than it was at the first. The fact that I am able to respond to the production in Liege is still exemplified by a faith, blind or otherwise, in my own reading of a situation. In many ways, directing can be seen as a placing oneself in a spectator’s position: of making decisions based on one’s own judgement and taste.

Adding the new Sarah and Andrew scene feels right, and I am affording that feeling the status of a requirement. The work *feels* as though it is short of something, I *think* I know what that something is, and accordingly I can then say that the work *needs* something else in order to be put *right*. It is a process of assumptions wherein the language one uses (even if that language is no more or less than the language of thought) presupposes some kind of logical link between response and reaction. The reality may be no more than a stumbling in the half-light of the latter stages of making, rather than in the darkness of beginnings. ‘Thoughts’, in this sense and at this point in the process, emerge as combinations of memories, expectations and sensations; in the context of making performance they can be described as movements (or moments) which have not yet happened. Some are more fleeting and ephemeral than are others. The ones that last longest or arrive with most force are the ones most likely to be translated into action and transcribed into the performance text.

**9-5-99**

Because the brain is not like a computer - inasmuch as it is not capable of repeating its actions and it is equally incapable of preserving ideas in a vacuum – thoughts are subject to the vagaries of time.<sup>1</sup> The wonderful idea of today is exposed tomorrow as a sham device. This happens. Experience – or thought as memory – tells us not to worry overmuch about these shifts, for just as much scientific research concludes that its original hypothesis was fundamentally wrong, so the creation of performance is a fluid game of re-adjustments, re-negotiations and blind alleys. The only litmus paper we possess is the way we feel and think the work is shaping up. It is as imprecise an endeavour as one could ever encounter. Wittgenstein told us that problems are solved, not by giving new



information, but by arranging what we already know, and this is a close approximation to the act of creative making.<sup>2</sup> We work with what we know, arranging that knowledge into a new syntax. A syntax that allows us to create a structure that is then able to convey more than the individual elements could hope to contain. We trust that this structure will work, and by ‘work’ we mean that it will communicate something of the maker’s intent.

With work where the structure is complex, the maker might favour a certain type of spectator. Certainly, with *At Last Sight*, the work has been made thus far with a view to presentations to ‘informed’ viewers. The ways in which these spectators have been so informed (and the ways in which I hope future spectators will be) is in the sense of them constituting a ‘guessing right’ group. Every maker of work will have her or his own ‘ideal’. John Cage, for example, has written that he is

on the side of keeping things mysterious, and I have never enjoyed understanding things. If I understand something, I have no further use for it. So I try to make a music which I don’t understand and which will be difficult for other people to understand, too.<sup>3</sup>

A cognitive process is required from spectators: one that allows for them to piece together a positive response out of their own experiences of non-narrative theatre forms. Just as my own processes of making are guesses, so then do spectators undertake the processes of reception. Writing specifically about spoken language, Sue Savage-Rumbaugh nevertheless goes some considerable way towards articulating the process of making work for public reception, alongside the attendant process of receiving, when she states that

Comprehension demands an active intellectual process of listening to another party while trying to figure out ... the other's meaning and intent – both of which are always imperfectly conveyed. We know what we think and what we wish to mean. We don't have to figure out 'what it is we mean', only how to say it. By contrast, when we listen to someone else, we not only have to determine what the other person is saying, but also what he or she means by what is said, without the insider's knowledge that the speaker has.<sup>4</sup>

We make performance in the knowledge of this imprecision because, as Lewis Carroll's Dodo says to Alice, it is generally the case that the best way to explain a thing is to do it. We can imagine 'perfect' performances without ever being able to make them, just as we can harbour dreams of 'perfect' spectators, who pick up on our every *nuance*, no matter how subtle or strange. But the testing ground for performance is performance. Written words are measured. They can be corrected and refined. A draft is recognised as such in ways that performances are not. When practical work in progress goes public it does so, almost always, without the safety net status of a work in transition. Weak work analysed well is still weak work, even though the analysis may break new ground. We make work because we need to test our own 'guessing right'. The results are only ever good for the time it takes for the performance to run in the there and then. Perhaps not even for that long, because in watching work play, we are already refining and rethinking as we watch.

As ever, it seems, within the pages of this work, this sounds more bleak than it feels. *At Last Sight* is already as accomplished a piece of work as I had ever allowed myself to expect. Perhaps there is something in the nature of a reflective process, which is drawing me towards an articulation that proffers gloom in *lieu*



of the optimism that I actually feel. Anybody who has made performances will realise that certain of the issues arising in rehearsal are actually pleasant to work through in practice and equally unpleasant to describe.<sup>5</sup> We need to remember that the making of performance in the context within which I am functioning is a choice and not an imperative. There is a joy in the process, which the isolation of writing this thesis is at some odds with. There have been no rehearsals that I have not been excited to attend; no problems of where to go next that I have not been pleased to seek solutions to. Even during those rehearsals when the work feels like a game of Solitaire in which the shuffling of the deck has created a situation where no possibility of 'success' is possible, something positive remains. For, unlike the imposition of order on a chance configuration of a hand of cards (where each new configuration is indeed 'new') every 'failed' rehearsal is always also a success. I can recognise from this that the stages of the creative process undertaken to this point have involved preparation, incubation, inspiration and evaluation, and that any divisions between the stages have been elastic.

**10-5-99**

One of the central ideas of *At Last Sight* is the conflict between truth and lies. To this end, differing perceptions are actively encouraged. A truth may be read as a lie and *vice versa*. There is, I hope, a tension in this which is more than glib and ironic. When detachment and engagement are being sought in this way, however, it is difficult to envisage any distancing from that same postmodernism where irony is seen to reign. *At Last Sight* is about representation, and it plays with representation in a self-conscious way. It is about an erosion of fixity and a distrust of meaning. It is about the recognition that everything spoken is always the already said. It is concerned with the slippery relationship between 'I' and

'You'. It wants control and it wants to be given away. It seeks indeterminacy (and is determined to have it). It strives for originality within an absence of faith in originality as a realistic aim.

I write the above as reminders to myself as much as pointers to the reader. I write because, like the performers in *At Last Sight*, I am no longer sure of the distinction between the truth as it was and the truth that I have subsequently invented. Like Alice, I am losing and finding myself in a strange place. For me, that place is the Wonderland gap between the past events of rehearsal to performance and the present event of performance to rehearsal. Derrida's assertion that nothing can exist outside of the text is becoming all too painfully real. Lost in the text of *At Last Sight* I am no longer able to see a way clear. I am not sure whether *At Last Sight* is a fact or an event. Whether this thesis is the experience itself or merely a trace of the experience of the performed other. As Laura Marcus states in *Auto/Biographical Discourses* 'The self does not pre-exist the text but is constructed by it ... the self 'finds' itself in its acts of self-expression.'<sup>6</sup>

I know that the work's proceeding without a clear plan is no handicap. What *At Last Sight* may have been hindered by in terms of its having no blueprint for a route by which to progress, has been equally fortuitous in that that same absence has provided space for progression, which was impossible to predict. The educational philosopher J. P. Guilford recognises this as being paradigmatic of divergent thinking

In tests of convergent thinking there is almost always one conclusion or answer that is regarded as unique, and thinking is to be channelled or controlled in the direction of that answer.... In



divergent thinking, on the other hand, there is much searching about or going off in various directions. This is most obviously seen when there are no unique conclusions. Divergent thinking ... is characterised ... as being less goal-bound. There is freedom to go off in different directions .... Rejecting the old solution and striking out in some direction is necessary.<sup>7</sup>

The process of creating *At Last Sight* is an example of divergent thought ... although at times this seems like to complimentary a term to describe that which *feels* so chaotic.<sup>8</sup> Bertrand Russell's *Enquiry into Memory and Truth* tells us that for a journey of investigation to have any worth it needs to be commenced with inarticulate certainty and concluded with articulate hesitation.<sup>9</sup> Allan Owens writes in *Mapping Drama* that whilst the most overtly problematical educational states are ignorance and certainty the single worst case scenario is always encountered in 'articulate certainty'.<sup>10</sup> If the process of making *At Last Sight* is demonstrable of a faith in anything at all then it is of a faith in doubt. In the concept of uncertainty as a thing to be clung to and sustained. Kenneth J. W. Craik embraces doubt as a positive phenomenon

If I ever conceive of any original idea, it will be because I have been abnormally prone to confuse ideas ... and have thus found remote analogies and relations which others have not considered! Others rarely make these confusions, and proceed by precise analysis.<sup>11</sup>

There is also the issue of group. Not in the sense of the feelings of power recognised at the close of Chapter Four, so much as in the pleasure of working with people who share a commitment to making work *work*. The feelings of camaraderie are at times quite intense. As a teacher, I take pleasure from introducing ideas, which the students will be encouraged to learn from and

through. As a part of the group, I take even more pleasure in the erosion of the teacher/student relationship that exists elsewhere within the curriculum. A part of this has been formed by the trip to Liege. We travelled together, took our meals together, drank together and talked for extended periods of time, all of which would be impossible within the 'normal' structures of timetabled contact on campus. Accordingly, I feel that I have come to know the cast well, and to like them as people at the same time as I can acknowledge their accomplishments as students.

How far can this go before it reads as a *clique*? How openly can I state my emotional attachment to the group and still function in my professional capacity as a lecturer? Although I will not carry out the assessment of the *At Last Sight* group, I do teach a course in Contemporary Theatre Practice where Andrew Proudfoot, Elizabeth Hague, Sarah Robertson and Glenn Robertson are my students. I am also likely to function as a second marker on the assessment of these and other members of the group on other courses. Whilst I may feel able to separate issues of affection from those of assessment, I need to remain aware that other students (and indeed my colleagues in the department) may not be quite so sure. Perception is important, and it would be foolish of me to think that the opinions of others did not matter so long as my own conscience was clear. As far as the students in the group go, I am confident that they share my faith in dispassionate marking. They know (I hope) that being pleased with their progress is one thing (I cannot mark *that* anyway, even if I were able to mark anything at all) whilst being pleased with them (because I find their company pleasing) is another thing entirely.



What I would be distressed to discover would be any reduction in the recognition of the group's worth as students, for no greater reason than that they are working closely with a tutor for whom that close working relationship is inevitably spilling over into close relationships.

This is not to suggest that we socialise together outside of rehearsals. I do not meet with members of the group at times other than those we have arranged as part of the course. But it does happen that when I see them by chance in the department we are likely to stop and talk, in ways that are less likely to occur with 'other' students. To a certain extent, this is happening with each of my colleagues who are working on productions. The closeness is a part of the process. In making work together, we reveal much of who we are, and in so doing an intimacy is created. Without some sort of trust, much of the work made would never (*could never*) emerge. With *At Last Sight* this phenomenon is writ large because the work is intrinsically dealing with aspects of self. Just as the cast has had nowhere to hide from the exposure of much that makes them who they are, so I have been unable to avoid witnessing these acts of revelation as and when they have emerged. As we have seen through Grotowski's work, this revelation is at its most acute when performers play their characters by playing who they are. They 'must not illustrate but accomplish an act'.<sup>12</sup> In so doing they 'express as fact the fiction of their narratives'.<sup>13</sup>

These last few paragraphs will be regarded as either a deviation from or a development of my *rationale* for the new scene with Andrew and Sarah.

depending upon the views of the reader. For my own purposes, the thoughts are developmental, in that the process of description and explanation is perpetually interlocking. One cannot be separated out from the other, so that pages of 'what' are followed neatly by pages of 'how' and then still more discrete pages of 'why'. The rehearsal process of *At Last Sight* is the same as this. We throw ideas around and are as likely to sit down and talk the ideas through as we are to get on our feet and try to work them out practically. The thinking is as central to the work as is the doing. If this is regarded as a 'luxury' (and I am sure that a great many directors working professionally with only a very limited time to create would feel that it is) then it is a luxury that is receding as the time between the now of rehearsal and the then of the final performance is collapsing.

The second idea brought back from America is that the consumption of alcohol as a part of *At Last Sight* needs to be ritualised in some way. There seems to be something innately British about drinking such vast quantities in such a brief time. The fact that it conforms to one of the abiding stereotypes of British behaviour is making me feel that we should exaggerate the actions somehow. There are also the ongoing issues of energy and pace. I have been wondering if some sort of drinking game (which again seems to be a quintessentially British pastime) would not provide a means of investing the work with pace at the same time as that pace is arrived at *via* an activity that is appropriate within the performance framework already in place.

**11-5-99**

In the rehearsals leading up to the performance in Liege, the cast worked with non-alcoholic drinks, rather than wine.<sup>14</sup> We had only one full rehearsal where



wine was used. This was a matter of cost as much as anything else. I am already facing the prospects of explaining to my head of department how much money we will need to spend on each of the four performances in Chester, just in terms of buying wine. This is going to cost upwards of £70.00 per night. In Liege, where table wine is cheaper than *Coca-Cola*, this was not an issue, and I was happy to pay for the wine myself. In England, the costs will have to be met departmentally and then paid back out of box office receipts. We have considered using either non-alcoholic wine or coloured water in performance, and although this is something we have currently decided against, it is not ruled out for some time in the future. At the moment, the drinking, and the ways in which that drinking impact on individual performances within the work, are features of *At Last Sight*. This was never likely to be a production where the imitation of an action was going to be favoured over the presentation of an action itself. To borrow again from the traditions of Grotowski: “The performance is not an illusionist copy of reality, its imitation ... The actor does not play, does not imitate, or pretend. He is himself”.<sup>15</sup>

Whilst the performers will not be ‘acting drinking’, they will be drinking in a performative fashion. We have written a series of words and numbers, for which I am planning to create corresponding ‘ways of drinking’. The cast will inevitably develop these ‘ways’ further. At the moment, they are movements such as swirling the glass numerous times and then draining it; spinning wildly, coming to a halt and drinking; drinking whilst attempting to speak; drinking from each other’s glasses; drinking whilst laying on one’s back; shaking the glass up and

down, in the manner of slamming Tequila. There is no overt logic to the movements themselves. The words written are as follows:

- 1: Absolution.
- 2: Redemption.
- 3: Ephemera.
- 4: Solace.
- 5: Isolation.
- 6: Indicative Thought.

How the words and the actions come together, even if the idea stays, is not yet known.<sup>16</sup> I am imagining a concentrated burst of activity. A wild drinking game, where the rules seem to make absolute sense to the performers and absolutely no sense to the spectators. So that one performer might start the ‘game’ by calling a word - a literal cue – and then the cast drink themselves into near-oblivion, perhaps until another cue is uttered, or perhaps until all of the wine is consumed. What I do not want any more is the leisurely drinking of Liege without something more *urgent* that lifts it. There is an obvious analogy to be drawn between drinking and forgetting. I like the idea of this forgetting being twofold. In the first place, it is consistent with the content of *At Last Sight*, inasmuch as the content is thematically concerned with love and loss. In the second place, I will be interested to see what effect swift drinking has on the performers’ ability to remember the words and actions still to come. It is a means of denying the performers the chance to drink at their own pace and also of a giving away of control ... of my control as a director and of the students’ as performers.

I have talked some of this through with the group and we are already looking at ways of working this scene and of a point in the work where it might best fit. We are also discussing the possibility of allowing any one member of the cast the



opportunity to start the scene at any time that she or he chooses. Leaving it, if not entirely to chance, then at least to the instincts of the cast, rather than to the decidability in advance of the director.

The third intervention is a piece of music, *Lullaby*, recorded by Shawn Mullins.<sup>17</sup> This track was played repeatedly on American radio stations and on my return I played the song to the group. It was played in a rehearsal and at some considerable volume. The song became an instant soundtrack. We played it whenever we reached moments in rehearsal of not knowing where to go next. The song is so ‘American’ that I want to use it in some way, if only because it is a record of a particular period of the process of making the work. The words of the song are delivered in a laconic fashion (the words themselves tend towards the maudlin) apart from the chorus, which comes in with a rush and lifts the track.

In Liege we used a radio, tuned in as part of the performance in order to allow the random to infiltrate the work. We all liked this idea, although we probably liked the reality rather less. Not only did the tuning in take some time, it also happened upon some dour-sounding stations just at the moment when the piece was so in need of an injection of pace and volume. At one point, I had wanted to use the sound of a radio playing softly all the way through *At Last Sight*, as though the sounds the spectators and performers were hearing were the sounds of a radio through a hotel wall. Like the whispered words of *A Winter’s Tale*. We lost that idea somewhere along the way and the piece now feels like it does not need it. It smacks now of too naturalistic a device, as though I had been striving for an imitative ‘other’, rather than seeking to exploit the space as it is. Using *Lullaby* in

place of the radio takes us away from our original idea. Notwithstanding that, I strongly suspect that we will end up using the track.

Andrew Proudfoot has created a piece of text that centres upon an appeal for a partner. The words are not without a sense of desperation. When he read them out in rehearsal, we all felt that they should be included in the performance. It seems appropriate for Andrew to speak this section immediately after either a session of manic drinking, or the section where he forces his own head under water. This may, of course, have no logic whatsoever. It may be no more than another guess. Be that as it may, watching and listening to Andrew's delivery sparked these connections and they seem to make sense within my own reading of the structure of our work. Andrew seems to want to place himself at some emotional risk within *At Last Sight*, and I like the idea of this emotional risk coming after the physical risk of the drowning scene. The moment where Andrew puts his head under water does bring its own risk. Rather than holding his breath, he attempts to breathe the water, to take it deliberately into his lungs. To force himself to drown.<sup>18</sup>

Sarah Skelton's section on the female orgasm is being reworked. The way the scene works now is that whilst she is in the process of speaking in a dry and informative manner, pointing to the prone and shrouded Sarah Robertson with a cane, Elizabeth Hague is mirroring the words with actions of her own, and is doing so in an equally deadpan way. As Sarah says that 'nipples become erect', Elizabeth points to Glenn Robertson's chest (Glenn and Elizabeth are seated side by side on the bed at this point); when Sarah speaks of the vagina contracting,



‘adjusting to circumstances’, Elizabeth closes her own fist in front of Glenn’s groin. Whilst this is going on, Andrew is plunging his head into a basin of water. In rehearsal, at least, this compression of three previously discrete scenes into one collage is playing effectively enough for us to run with the idea. Learned text, a disturbing level of risk and deadpan humour are placed side by side in a recurring montage. The eye of the watcher is drawn around the space in ways that seem to exemplify the freedom of watching live work, and the layering of sounds and images is creating a constructive cacophony.

Sarah Skelton knows that she will have to work hard to attract and hold the spectator’s attention, which is giving her more of a challenge than was previously the case. Andrew’s plunging (which is a development of an earlier scene where his head was held under water as part of an interrogation that never really worked in rehearsal) does now play as an attempt at suicide. Andrew emerges from the water gagging and coughing, only to thrust his head back under. There is something deeply disturbing about the action at the same time as it is fundamentally absurd. Sarah is ignoring both Andrew and Elizabeth and is playing only a response to the spectator’s displacing of attention.

At the moment, I am the only spectator. Sometimes Chris, Laurent and Anke join me. We find the scene funny and moving in turns, and the performers involved enjoy playing it. There are no doubts that we will use it in the piece. The only concern I have is that it may look as though we are expecting a certain response. I do not think that this is the case anywhere else in *At Last Sight*. What I want to avoid are moments where we run the risk of failing in public to match up to our

directorial and performative intentions. During the rest of the work, our conceits are less overtly displayed than they might be here.

Increasingly, the work reads, I think, as elusive, as a thing almost but never quite accessible. The scene I have just described feels a little like we are going for broke, pitching a mass of energy into one extended moment as a type of climactic *dénouement*.

The work is becoming multi-layered, to the extent where the thinness of certain layers is disguised by a number of other (perhaps equally thin) layers. Whereas I was able, much earlier on in the process of making, to refer to Hockney's *Joiners* as a type of blueprint for *At Last Sight*, the grid-like placing of images side by side has shifted now towards a more appropriately performative overlap. One of the strongest things to have emerged in recent rehearsals is this sense of simultaneity. It is as though the running orders we have been so keen to create, as a means of confirming structure, have worked against us up until this point precisely because they have located actions sequentially. Our running order still exists - and we still value the sense of structure that it brings - but we are much more inclined of late to see scenes bleeding into each other. *Joiners* was useful as way into *At Last Sight* ... the problem, I feel, has been one of knowing when to let *this* work break free of *that* structure.

The running order we have now is one which, although it will be inevitably subject to change (and overlap) nevertheless serves as an indication of the ways in which *At Last Sight* has shifted since its presentation in Liege. For ease of



understanding and for purposes of economy within this chapter, I will refer from this point on to the Liege version as *At Last Sight 1* and the yet to be performed version in Chester as *At Last Sight 2*. It is my intention that in the conclusion to this thesis I will be referring to the work in its entirety whenever its title is used.

Whereas *At Last Sight 1* began with the cast removing the traces of previous performances, *At Last Sight 2* will begin with the cast milling around as a French language tape plays. The removal of traces *looked* fine, but I was always concerned that it was beginning the work with too much that was overtly illusory. The space was new to us and the traces were faked. Ironically, because we will be performing at Chester over four nights, the traces of rehearsals and previous performances will be real. Notwithstanding this, the on-stage eradication of evidence as a starting point no longer possesses the currency it once did. What we have now is the cast *behaving* rather than *acting* naturally. Having no prescribed movements to engage in means that they are able to initiate a performance wherein the lines between 'ordinary' and 'performative' attitudes are immediately introduced. As director, I have no idea of who will do what and when. They move amongst themselves and into the audience as they so choose.

The French language tape is one that was played by my wife at our home. My wife is currently taking a French evening class. The formulaic banality of the text amused us both: a customer in a bar ordering a coffee; a traveller, lost and asking for directions to the railway station; an encounter at a Lost Property desk, with an enquiry about a mislaid camera. The dialogue is delivered in so flat and colourless a fashion as to drain all of the emotion from the words. The tone is every bit as

monotonous as Anna Garnett's speaking voice, but the context of the tape subverts this monotony, changing it from weakness into choice. Listening to the tape felt a little like the experience of watching *At Last Sight*. It was both similar to and different from. Using the tape at the start of the show provides a type of clue for the spectators. It suggests being somewhere far from home, where the rules are not quite the same and have only been half-learned.<sup>19</sup> It communicates everything necessary to comprehension and nothing that is needed to feel and to emote. In this way, it is both a parallel to *At Last Sight* and its antithesis.

The French language tape is replaced with another cassette. All of this is done in full view of the audience. The lights are 'theatrical', but basic. A general wash of light across the space. The only change to this state now is towards the end of the piece, when the lights are taken half way down, paused and then taken to black. At all other times, the lights stay as they are. The new tape contains dialogue lifted from a Hal Hartley film, *Flirt*. Two American performers, a male and a female, have a brief conversation about commitment. We hear a crash, a chair breaking, which signals an abrupt end. The next voices we hear belong to two Japanese women, taken from a video recording of an extract of an unknown film.<sup>20</sup> They speak in whispers, urgently. The tape shifts then to a section from the Michael Mann film, *Heat*. Four men and three women talking in restaurant. This conversation cuts out and a telephone conversation between one of the males and another woman fades in.

During the Japanese section, Sarah Skelton walks off-stage, through a swing door and into a shower and toilet area. She showers, fully costumed, as are all of the



women, in a white shirt and blue jeans. The men are all in dark suits and white shirts. All are barefoot. Sarah re-emerges as the telephone conversation ends. The tape is clicked off and thrown to one side by Glenn Robertson. Sarah speaks falteringly, using a type of half-invented sign language as an attempt to add to her articulation. She is wet through during this section. The sentences she speaks are sometimes no more than one or two words. The tone is sombre. At one point she takes a Polaroid photograph of the audience. She lays down stage right, holding this photograph.

The running order we have is full enough for me to be able to go through each of the elements and provide a commentary and explanation, which would run to several thousand more words. The running order is currently comprised of fifty seven separate sections, and to describe and explain each one would be perhaps not the most purposive way of providing the reader with a developing sense of the work. The text we worked with is transcribed as an appendix; the same will be the case with *At Last Sight 2*. Better then to use this chapter to underpin and theoretically contextualise my current feelings and thoughts about the work, *and also about this stage of making work*, rather than to describe in words that which the reader will have access to on video.

**12-5-99**

I will describe the thinking that is driving *At Last Sight*. Like the project itself, this thinking has changed and developed. I am less inclined at this point to be satisfied with an inability to articulate (even to myself) the *rationale* behind directorial and/or writerly decisions. Where I was, only a matter of months ago, prepared to accept creative making as a thing driven in part at least by untraceable stimuli, I

am now inclined towards a searching for the origin. This does not mean that the search is always successful. But it does mean that ideas that cannot be comfortably traced can be made subject to the same level of analysis as those ideas that can be seen to stem from a logical body of theory. At times, this might result in the articulation of incomprehension. Where this occurs, I am confident that this articulation is as valid as any other. It is not the job of this thesis to prove that the writer has the 'correct' answer to every challenge thrown up in the activity of making work, so much as it is to document a particular process in a manner that is as thorough as it is informed. To argue thus - for an analytical framework that can be applied to the creation of a performance event - does not amount to an attempt to fix meaning. Rather, it allows me to identify the various elements of *At Last Sight* that exist for analysis from the perspectives I am choosing to employ.

*At Last Sight 2* is likely to contain more elements of narrative, and indeed more of a narrative drive, than did *At Last Sight 1*, and there are certain (broadly postmodern) notions of narratology that inform the work. It begins with an acceptance that one's identity is determined by the narrative elements of one's own life. By this I mean that the best, perhaps even the only way to establish an identity is *via* the telling of story. We could better describe this as an ordering of episodes in such a way that one's life can be read as a narrative. What we do is thus who we are. Events, which we might regard as having a particular significance, are organised in ways that allow us to understand who we are. In this way, narrative provides us with the opportunity to conceive of self.<sup>21</sup>



Any and all narratives have a point of view, whether concealed or overt. The narrative itself goes some considerable way towards determining the location from which the spectator/reader experiences events and the narrative will always seek in some way to exert a control over the spectator's ways of perceiving. (At this point, I will abandon references to 'readers' and use 'spectators' as an all-encompassing term). By controlling, or guiding, the spectator's perception of *At Last Sight* I am attempting to suggest an identification with a certain way of watching. I am asking the spectator to engage in a particular type of watching, one that allows the spectator to believe that s/he is making of the work whatever s/he feels, at the same time as this process is actually set up and controlled by the maker. It offers a freedom from a directorial 'directing of the gaze', which is actually quite false. In creating a performance wherein the spectator's eye can wander without shame, I am still very much seeking control. We can recognise this as being in relative accord with notions of Althusser's 'interpellation', inasmuch as it is "a process which is controlled by the text, yet the reader is under the illusion that identification is freely entered into."<sup>22</sup>

*At Last Sight* abandons the idea of an audience as a like-thinking mass, since the product will be played in the knowledge that spectatorial identification and the reading of our played out narrative will differ from one person to the next. It is also being created with a faith (a faith in right guessing?) that enough of the audience will respond in similar ways to certain sections. For example, there are points when I want them to make certain connections, even at the same time as I cling fast to their freedom to choose. *Theoretically*, I want freedom; *directorially*, I want control. The narrative of *At Last Sight* is also the narrative of this tension.

Notions of the male gaze are explored in *At Last Sight* (in both versions 1 and 2) and issues of gender in terms of the way we play and the way we watch have always been a concern of this work. It is a commonplace reading of the way performance is generally constructed to say that narratives are split between the passive, and often eroticised image of women and the more active portrayal of males.<sup>23</sup> Men are doubly active in performance, in that they are usually the people who make things happen – the pro-actors to the women’s reactors – and they are also the active lookers. This gaze provides the male spectator with a different type of identification with the narrative in question from females. This results in a situation where males are afforded a narrative and visual pleasure, whereas women are more likely to associate themselves most strongly with the passive and prettified object of the gaze. The old idea (of old art) is an illustration of this, where we see galleries filled with paintings by men of female nudes.

Male performers often function then as surrogates for spectators. We could describe this as an activity where men are subjects and women are objects. The narrative of *At Last Sight* subverts this. The text was always written without gender specification ... partly as a consequence of not knowing the gender breakdown or number of students who would sign up for this project, but primarily because I did not want to write certain lines or situations for men and others for women. Keeping the written text open in this way affords the cast the opportunity to impose gender on words simply by dint of the choices they make. In this way, either Sarah Skelton or Andrew Proudfoot could have elected to read the parts of **A** or **B** in the newly scripted section. The fact that Andrew has by now



opted for **B** and Sarah **A** may or may not be the most appropriate choice, but it is *their* choice. The imposition of gender was not of my making.

In terms of the ways in which the gaze could be said to rest on a person as object, I have attempted throughout to avoid a situation where women are disproportionately passive. The ways in which this has been achieved (and I think it *has* and *is being* achieved) are not through a counting up of situations, so that a passive female here is replaced by a passive male in the next 'scene'. What we have done is to make all of the cast viewers of their own and their fellow performers' actions. By this, I mean that each scene within the performance space created by the chairs, back board, sound desk and lights, is observed by the rest of the cast, whether these observers are actively engaged in the scene or not. At its most successful – if by 'successful' I am referring here to the success of the subverting of the male gaze – the entire performance and all within it function as both object and subject. We watch the performers making the performance and we watch them watching the ways that it is made. The members of the cast adjust their positions as they go.

At times, the issue of gaze is treated more directly. When Sarah Skelton asks a male spectator why he is watching her at the expense of other performers, she is at once identifying herself as the passive subject *and* the active watcher. In returning the gaze she shifts the balance. At another point in the performance, Sarah, in the midst of applying lipstick, says to the audience: "And now you watch me.... Are my lips painted red for you? Is this done for your gaze? Am I becoming someone

else for you? Well, I'm still Sarah. Some of you know me. I'm twenty-one years old. I'm Sarah."

The only time that a photograph is taken of the audience, it is taken by a female performer.<sup>24</sup> Again, this is Sarah Skelton. This is no accident. In opening the live text of *At Last Sight 2*, and then laying on the floor, to be looked at by the male performers as well as the spectators, Sarah is the most likely of the females to be regarded as 'object'.<sup>25</sup> Further to this, she describes a female orgasm and is subsequently photographed by Glenn Robertson as she lies on the bed. It is important to me that this objectification is challenged in the work.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps three quarters of the way through *At Last Sight 2*, as the running order currently stands, three of the men, Glenn, Andrew and Chris, sit on the bed and contort their bodies into positions that approximate to pornographic images normally associated with women. The women move into the audience and watch this section, with either Sarah Robertson or Liz Hague taking a Polaroid photograph of the men and then pinning the picture up on the board. It is perhaps in every sense of the word too crude an indication to the audience. Nevertheless, it serves I think a useful purpose. It is an image I would never consider asking female students to adopt (I should point out that the men are clothed throughout). The chief reason for this, even if the context of the work made the request 'reasonable', would be my own position of power over the cast. As a man, such a request would be likely to read as precisely the type of active gazing at an eroticised female passivity that I am seeking to avoid.<sup>27</sup>



*At Last Sight* is attempting to raise the issue of sexual identity through the impossibility of any fixing of the subject ... not least the 'subject' of Sarah Skelton. When she is presented within the piece it is done - in almost every scene that she 'drives' - in a way that turns her into both the reader and the read: as a spectacle and also as a spectator. Inasmuch then as the spectator is refused a permanent position from which to view, the very process of perception is rendered unstable.

Issues of gender are central to *At Last Sight* and I am pleased that the ways in which it is being treated are consistent with my views at the start of the process. Other things have changed. I am aware, for example, that I am referring increasingly to 'the audience', instead of 'the spectator' of earlier chapters. Again, I put this down to the same tension between the theory of ideas and the practice of action as was mentioned a few paragraphs ago. There are inevitable compromises between intention and application, which mean that one's beliefs are tempered in part by the process of working collaboratively and in part by the absence of the safety net that libraries and offices provide. Performance can be unforgiving of theory (Brecht told us that a good idea badly presented dies a long time)<sup>28</sup> just as in its own way theory can be unforgiving of performance. Ideas of gaze-subversion and authorial redemption may be all well and good, but the pragmatics of making a performance mean that many ideas that are sound in theory are sacrificed in rehearsal.

Within the narrative of *At Last Sight* there has been an attempt to match what is being said with the manner of its saying. The written language of the performance

itself could already be said to have form, even before it is made physical in practice. By this I mean that the manner of the writing carries with it a certain formal implication: it is episodic, it is fragmentary and it is possessed in certain sections of a particular melancholy. We cannot then refer to it as content without form. By the same token, the form of *At Last Sight* is also a type of content. The ways in which the work is constructed and the elements that make up its parts are sympathetically inclined, to the point where any attempted separation would be invidious. Similarly, it makes less sense to refer to ‘narrative elements’ of *At Last Sight* than to regard the entire work as narratological. Just as a life is contained in a series of episodes, which we string together, overlay and juxtapose in order to obtain an overall image, so the sometimes-disparate elements of *At Last Sight* combine to make up the narrative of itself.

We can take this further and suggest that the narrative of *At Last Sight* and my reading of it here in this thesis are identical. As Derrida would have it, any standing outside of the text is impossible.<sup>29</sup> This may mean that the work is so self-referential that I am unable to read it at all. My own theorising would thus become not so much a critical practice beyond and outside the performance, but an indivisible element of the (critical) performance itself. Am I able to refer any longer to *At Last Sight* as a performance in time, which is discrete, and this thesis as words, which occupy space and are separate? I feel not. The project is no longer *that* and the thesis *this*.

Any shift from theory into practice - such as my own movement from full-time immersion in academia to a sustained attempt at making performance - has the



potential to lead to a type of self-contemplation that in turn renders performance theoretical.<sup>30</sup> I can recognise *At Last Sight* as a performance that is at once a discourse on narrative and a narrative itself. Just as I would be unable to describe something 'postmodern' as 'original', so this work is emerging as a revisiting and rereading of its own (*my* own) past. *At Last Sight* seeks to alert or remind the spectator to the fact that it is itself an artificial construct, and it does this through an abandoning of representation (mimetic or otherwise) in favour of a self-referentiality where nothing is ever fully fixed. That it does this in the same space and at the same time as it offers the 'reality' of the rapid consumption of alcohol only serves, it seems to foreground these issues of deconstruction and undecidability. Deconstruction is always an issue. From the start, *At Last Sight* has been assembled in a way that has invited deconstruction, and it has done this because its structure reveals something of its own knowledge of certain deconstructive theories of performance. The work thus advertises itself as an appropriate site for deconstruction. It does this through the lack of 'plot' and the irregularity of the authorial voice. Its openness to deconstruction is taken further still by the disjunctive distinction between the illusory nature of certain events and the non-illusion of others - for example, the illusion-breaking activity of consuming considerable quantities of alcohol - which combine to create a world of slippage rather than of meaning.<sup>31</sup>

This slippage exists within the words as well as the actions of *At Last Sight*. The appropriation of certain extracts of text from, for example, L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* (spoken variously by Glenn Robertson, Andrew Proudfoot and Elizabeth Hague) and Montaigne's 1580 dictum on the presentation of self as 'a



work of good faith' (delivered, with a name-change by Chris Roberts) sits uneasily alongside 'original' words, such as those composed by either the cast or myself. When fictional films by famous directors are described *as though they exist*, and when these descriptions are intercut with descriptions of 'genuine' films, which are *described in the same manner*, then any comfortable acceptance of either 'truth' or 'fact' is denied. The cast are 'advertised' as lovers (two of them are now openly so), assuming that the spectators believe that to be true, then they will be inclined in Chester, as they were in Liege, to puzzle over which embraces are 'real' and which 'false'.<sup>32</sup> Everything slides out of place. The wine and cigarettes are 'real' and the Polaroid photographs provide evidence that certain events did indeed take place. And yet the performers embody no 'characters' with whom the spectators are allowed to engage and the work's fictionality is consistently exposed by the deliberate visibility of stage lights and control boards.

The aim is to produce a persistent destabilisation of expectation. The work purports to be about truth, yet it deals in lies (and lies in the way that it deals with truth); it foregrounds its status as a theatrical construction, and thereby as something false, at the same time as so much of it is seemingly 'real'. What *At Last Sight* is doing then is exploring the relationship that exists between the spectator and the work. The spectator is being asked to enter into more than the customary 'suspension of disbelief': s/he is being asked to 'believe' and to do this in spite of the fact that much of the performance is blatantly false.<sup>33</sup> I would argue that in this way the spectator is afforded a huge importance. The importance of spectatorship is not here that a particular response to *At Last Sight* might be more or less profound or incisive than any others, so much as it is the individual



spectator's *own response*. The 'you' of the spectator becomes as vital as the 'I' of the instigator of the action or the text. Furthermore, this 'you' is considerably less vexed. For whereas the 'I' is problematised by the difficulties of establishing any fixed sense of where the 'I' resides, the 'you' is always and only you the spectator, regardless of the text's chosen mode of delivery from one moment to the next.

### 13-5-99

In the continued use of 'I' in the text for *At Last Sight*, the spectator is reminded that any identification between the watcher and the watched is troubled. Who, after all, is the 'I' that one is seeing? There are no character's names, other than Arabella and Paris, and these are decided within the context of the performance. "You can be Arabella," Glenn Robertson tells Elizabeth Hague, "and I can be Paris." The identities are fictionalised even within the fictional frame of the performance. Elsewhere, Glenn is Glenn and Liz is Liz. What they are saying to the spectator is that this is one layer of performance within many others. At its most mimetic, then – and the Arabella and Paris section is played very naturalistically – the process of imitation is subject to its most emphatic exposure. What can be trusted here? When Andrew Proudfoot and Sarah Skelton work through the scene that was written in America, they do so with texts in their hands, long after they have learned the words. It is though *At Last Sight* is fearful of giving in to any type of empathetic engagement on the part of the spectator. This is both true and false. When Andrew tells the audience how lonely he is (and his is a loneliness that is true at the time of writing) I certainly do want an empathetic response from the spectators. What I do not want is empathy through fiction. If the spectators want to care, then let them care about truth (or at least a

kind of truth) rather than about the lie of lines written by another hand and learned.

The truth, though, cannot be easily tracked down. If the text tells the spectator that it is dishonest and this statement is seen to be true, then that truth belies the claims of dishonesty, even as they are being made. Equally, if *At Last Sight* is true, then its assertion of its intrinsic dishonesty is shown to be incorrect and false. The only claim for truth that can be made is that the work is never fully one thing or the other. Its journey from truth to lies and back is such that I am no longer able or even inclined to keep track of where truth starts and ends. I am not sure now that I ever was.

If we accept that realism is generally seen as something that has as its aim a type of mimetic transparency - so that its spectators witness an imitation of an action, which is 'life-like' without ever being really 'like life' - then *At Last Sight* can be seen as a work that sets out to foreground that very fakery. Theatrical devices are made visible and the language of the text tends towards opacity. Where words can be said to be imitative of particular experiences, the delivery of these sections is such that the very act of imitation is exposed. This self-reflexivity is a theme of postmodern performance ... it could even be said to *define* particular performances *as* postmodern. Linda Hutcheon explores this aspect in the chapter 'Historiographic Metafiction' in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, where she argues that self-reflexivity is a positive force in the construction of text

... provisionality and uncertainty (and the wilful and overt construction of meaning too) do not 'cast doubt upon their seriousness', but rather define the new postmodern seriousness that acknowledges



the limits and powers of reporting or writing the past, recent or remote.<sup>34</sup>

I can draw parallels between Hutcheon's notions of postmodern self-reflexivity and *At Last Sight*, as performance text, as performance and also *as this thesis*. The three aspects each explore issues of identity and subjectivity, of representation and reference, of intertextuality and appropriation, of the implications of the reading of one's self. A narrative voice that is subjective will inevitably draw attention to itself. The pronoun 'I' is likely to be used; the location and time of the text's construction will perhaps be made evident. This subjectivity is a feature of all of the work engaged in on this overall project, and it would be possible, and simple, to pull sections of writing from both the thesis and the text of *At Last Sight* as a means of exemplifying this point. In fact, the prolific nature of the references to person and place is such that the extrapolation of examples would be almost entirely unnecessary. The 'I' is everywhere in the work.

If received wisdom tells us that acting is about recreating truth from accepted words and repeated patterns of words, then the performers in *At Last Sight* are not acting. Clearly, they are. One can draw distinctions between 'performance' and 'acting', as indeed this thesis has attempted elsewhere, but these distinctions are often no more than tendentious exercises in the justification and promotion of one approach over another. Michael Kirby's continuum of acting, which he describes in *On Acting and Not Acting*, serves as a useful reminder that whereas 'acting' will generally function within a number of matrices, each of which combines to create the illusion of 'other', 'performance' can exist with no matrix whatsoever.<sup>35</sup>

What Kirby's continuum does not provide for is the fact that a matrix is as likely

to be internally as externally applied. If, for example, Sarah Robertson invests elements of her performance with an emotional and psychological underpinning at the same time as Laurent Ruggeri might be doing no more (?) than speaking remembered lines at given times and in certain spaces, can we say with any authority that one is acting and the other is not? If we accept that acting is as concerned with a state of mind as it is with any physical activity, then it becomes impossible to make any externally imposed distinctions between acting and performance that will hold true.

Conversely, if we believe the shifting state of 'acting' to be definable only by the 'actor', then we are denying the spectator any status as a valid provider and creator of meaning.

Because I am unable to monitor the states of the performers' minds at any given moment of any rehearsal (even if the students themselves were able to recognise the shifting ways in which they are attending, engaging and *pretending* from one instant to the next) I am unable to make any usefully distinctive determination of an 'in and out of actedness'. In effect, the performers are presenting their own agendas, within a text that also announces my own presence, and it is doing so at the same time as I am physically absent from the performance. In this, they are in one way indistinguishable from the performance *per se*. Their performances are ironic imitations in much the same way that *At Last Sight* is an ironic imitation of a performance. The performance, like the performers, and like this thesis, adopt different attitudes to self-narration. In the performance, certainly, there is evidence



of a denial of truth, which runs simultaneously with a contradictory assertion and of signs that function as little more than signs of signs.

It will be apparent to the reader that this thesis is troubled by time. I am not able to write about what might take place in any given rehearsals at the same time as I am writing about the thinking that is informing the work. Not within the form of notation adopted in these pages. Perhaps the only way to have achieved this would be to have written the words in overlapping boxes, so that what the reader experiences is

My ability to write about the falsification of facts as a means of foregrounding, through performance, the impossibility of presenting 'truth' and the unavoidable nature of error. So that the spectators can witness performers who are trying to make sense of the words of *At Last Sight* in ways that present assimilation, order, uncertainty and presentation all at once.

Thus articulating the postmodern tenet that the assertion of difference between fact and fiction, truth and lies is less relevant than an exploration of the spaces in between the two.

Hague says "Even when it's different, it always starts like this, with a world not listening to nothing to hear. When in this place and at this time: silent, witnessed, watched, we are wakened by dreams too sad for sleep." Only to have Anke Sauthof instructing her in very loud German to be more authoritative in her delivery, so that Elizabeth's words are displaced in the same way that a non-German speaking spectator's sense of how to view the scene is shifted even

as it is being made. At the same time as I describe the way

this scene is being rehearsed *at this point* in the rehearsal process. Explaining why the scene has been moved to the place it now occupies. Letting the reader know what my expectations for the scene might be; how Anke's interruption came about; why Elizabeth opted for the words she

At the same time as I rationalise the reasons for the changes has, what is occurring elsewhere in the space as they speak. after Liege.



This would result in a situation where the very thing that is designed to transmit comprehensible information would be rendered intelligible. The overlap inherent in the performance of *At Last Sight* is impossible to recreate on the printed pages of a thesis. This would not be the case with technology available on the World Wide Web. We are advised that

Literary theorists ... are predicting that in the twenty-first century people will be so used to receiving messages in non-linear forms that they will no longer think of writing continuous prose as the default means of conveying meaning.<sup>36</sup>

As a document with roots in the twentieth century, however late on that century may be, this thesis remains predominantly prose-bound and continuous.

**14-5-99**

The thesis itself is moving through time, as is the process of rehearsal, and yet its written form is a denial of the multiple layers of simultaneous occurrence experienced in practice. This results in a collapsing of time. The reader is aware of the point in *actual time* that rehearsals of *At Last Sight* have reached, because *that* time of the making is also *this* time of the writing. Recording the date on which each section of thesis is being written provides information about the stage in the process. However, it also suggests many periods of inactivity, when in fact the thoughts and events to be documented are perhaps being thought about at length. Reading may be being undertaken, or rehearsals may be so intense that time for writing is limited. Dating this section now tells the reader that the performances in Chester are imminent.

We have, in fact, only a matter of days before the work is presented. It feels ready. The cast seems to be as prepared as is possible, and they are all looking forward to

presenting the results of their endeavours. Three Level 3 performances have been presented in the last two weeks. An installation/performance, *Wounded with Dreams*; a three-act play from 1921, *Metaphysics of a Two-Headed Calf*, by Stanislaw Witkiexicz, and an untitled choreographic work.<sup>37</sup> *At Last Sight* is the last of the scheduled student-cast performances.

This chapter has moved from the beginnings of a description of changes wrought by a trip to America, and on through a rationalisation of those changes according to aspects of postmodern theory, to a position where *At Last Sight* is almost ready for performance ... and this movement has been swift. So swift, in fact, that the paragraphs to come will relate to a reflection on *At Last Sight*, rather than as a type of preparation. In these last few days, the pressure of bringing the work to its optimum state is denying the opportunities to write that existed when the rehearsal schedule was more leisurely. It is not just about the time spent on rehearsals, and on full-time teaching. It is about the necessity for some time spent away from *At Last Sight*. So that time spent away from rehearsals becomes time spent away from the thesis.<sup>38</sup> We pause here, not to gather breath so much as to preserve any breath that remains for the production. Our pause is a pause in the time of the writer, if not quite the reader. For the reader, we move immediately here into a reflection on the performances of *At Last Sight* at the Molloy Auditorium, University College Chester, on the evenings of May 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> at 8.00p.m.



## Performance

23-5-99

In writing here about *At Last Sight* as something finished, I am aware that the word 'finished' may be misleading. I have accepted the invitation from Festupic in Compiègne, and am in discussion with the International Association of University Theatre about ways in which *At Last Sight* might be integrated into a European performance project, *Connect*, which will run from November 1999 through till March of 2001. The work then is clearly ongoing. Notwithstanding this, it was always the intention that this thesis would chart the developments of *At Last Sight* up until such time as the work was presented for the academic assessment of the participating students.

It almost goes without saying to report that the work was different on every night. The human material of performance, in the sense of both performers and spectators, ensure that no two occasions will ever match up. The opening night audience was responsive. Laughter, where it came, came freely. It was, for the cast and myself, an ideal start. We felt, after only a few moments, that the production was a 'success'. This thesis is not focussing on the certain dynamics of audiences, so there is little point in a deviation here that moves in any detail away from what happened and on to the ways in which it was or was not received.<sup>39</sup> It is enough, perhaps, to recognise that the relationship between spectators and performers is such that each is as likely to be termed 'good' or 'bad' as is the other. From a performance perspective, a 'bad' audience is often no more than a group of people whose collective response suggests that the process of guessing entered into by the performance group was misjudged. As makers of work, we

seek confirmation from spectators of the wisdom, appropriateness and inventiveness of our decisions. An audience that fails to confirm this wisdom will be regarded as 'bad'. In this way, a totally silent audience can be interpreted as 'good', as long as their silence is possessed of the capability of being interpreted as attentiveness.

According to the above criteria, the audience at University College Chester was good. Each performance had its own flavour, and each of the performers was happier on certain nights with aspects of their own performance than they were on others. From the Monday through to and including the Wednesday, there were qualities and weaknesses in everybody's performances. For example, Sarah Robertson was visibly shaking when she was waiting for the audience to settle at the start of the performance on Monday. This was noticed by a colleague of mine who was in the audience in his role as assessor, and it is difficult to see how this shaking would not have been seen by every spectator. The shaking was prolonged and difficult to watch. As soon as Sarah was engaged in more overt 'performing', the shaking stopped as suddenly as it had started. The fact that this shaking was the physical manifestation of nervous tension made it something that was beyond Sarah's control. Notwithstanding this, she was eager on Tuesday to demonstrate, not least to herself, that she was able to assume a degree of control. Chris Roberts stumbled over lines on Tuesday in ways that were not apparent on other evenings;<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Hague's performance was more powerful on Monday and Wednesday than on Tuesday and Glenn Robertson was physically sick on Wednesday. That he was able to walk quickly out of the auditorium and on to the toilets situated in the corridor meant that the spectators were unaware of his



purpose. When he re-entered the space, I suspect that most of the audience felt that his leaving had been no more or less than a further example of the performers' freedom to behave naturally for much of the duration of the work.

The performance on Friday was the most effective of the four. To my mind, *At Last Sight* is a stronger and more internally coherent piece of work now than it was in Liege, which meant that every performance in Chester was a vindication of our decision to initiate a process of reconstruction. Be that as it may, the performance on Friday, May 21<sup>st</sup> saw *At Last Sight* at its best.<sup>41</sup> It was a powerful point for the project itself to end, and I am aware that the group will need some lifting if they are to recapture the qualities they displayed on the last night of the run at Chester. The audience was not set up to be supportive. The performance had sold out, but this was the case with every one of the performances. Perhaps the feedback that the group had received from audience members on the previous evenings had filtered down to subsequent spectators, so that they arrived with a positive anticipation. Many of the spectators were returning for a second sight.

#### 26-5-99

As this thesis has progressed, it has become increasingly difficult to engage in analysis that is not second-hand. The key moments in *At Last Sight* remain key moments, despite the fact that they have been discussed elsewhere in this work. This does not make them any easier to revisit. A useful articulation comes from the Level 3 students involved, each of whom has written about their experiences of making *At Last Sight*.<sup>42</sup> The level of both their eloquence and understanding has been impressive. With their approval, I will be including these essays under Appendix 9.<sup>43</sup> These essays will be assessed, with the grades being worth one

third of the overall mark. The other two thirds will come from their practical contribution to the module. I have been particularly impressed with the students' abilities to go beneath the surface of the work undertaken. In the occasional places where problems with vocabulary work against an easy communication of their thoughts, I am reminded most acutely that their own efforts have a validity that is missing at times from my own. Where I feel that I am searching for ideas to fit words, the students – each of them – has sought words to fit ideas. Their inadequacies pale against my own.<sup>44</sup>

**28-5-99**

*At Last Sight* became, in performance, something that belonged almost solely to the cast, and in reflecting here on some of their own experiences of the project I will make reference to all six of the Level 3 students' essays. I refer here to their essays because I am convinced that, like this thesis, they form part of the critical project that was and is *At Last Sight*, rather than as discrete critical commentaries. At times, the students' readings of the work will be challenged. When this occurs, it does so within the spirit of ongoing dialogue that has been a feature of the group since the very start.

The essays did not require titles, although each of the students in this group gave their work a name. These titles give a strong indication of what the students believed *At Last Sight* to be about: *'Truth' and 'Lies' in Performance: At Last Sight* (Andrew Proudfoot); *At Last Sight: Alienating or Liberating the Audience?* (Sarah Robertson); *'Art is a Lie which tells the Truth': Truth and Lies in At Last Sight* (Sarah Skelton); *Theatre is What Theatre Did* (Glenn Robertson); *At Last Sight: Truth & Lies, Reality & Fiction, Acting & Being* (Chris Roberts); *At Last*



*Sight: Voyeuristic Intention?* (Elizabeth Hague). I am unable to disclose or discuss the grades awarded for these essays, and readers will have to judge for themselves the quality of the work. What I can say is that the essays share what the assessment team took to be an intellectual engagement with specific concerns of the project.<sup>45</sup> My failure to reveal marks is not something that is done to protect the students from any embarrassment.

29-5-99

Before I begin to highlight here certain sections of these essays, in order to provide the reader with an insight into the perspective of particular students, I should note that the use of the pronoun 'I' is a feature of all of the work. None of these essays were 'tutored', in the sense that each of the students worked alone and without my guidance. Theoretical discussion was a part of the process of rehearsal, but did not carry over into specific assistance with essays. The work, when it was submitted, was as new to me as it was to my colleagues in the department. The use of 'I' is not then an attempt on any of the students' part to mirror in some way the 'I' of this thesis ... none of the students have seen any of this thesis and its structure has not been discussed. Their collective use of the 'I' is, I feel, a logical continuation of the prioritised 'I' of the production. Because their thoughts, ideas and feelings have been so central to the process of constructing *At Last Sight* it is only right and proper (as well as only natural) that this foregrounding of their own agendas is a feature of their written submissions. Where certain modules undertaken by students at University College Chester have an express concern with the 'inculcation of technique, rather than the pursuance of personal agenda'<sup>46</sup> (and I place these words in inverted commas because they are here so often used *verbatim*) this project has actively sought to reverse that



concern. The work has been made to the students' agendas, and also, of course, to my own. Accordingly, their use of the personal pronoun is both expected and acceptable.

Elizabeth Hague's essay picks up on certain key moments in *At Last Sight* in order to explore the work's relationship with its audience. The way she cites these moments is indicative of the sense of ownership felt by the group. When Elizabeth writes "Most performance is disguised autobiography, however, this autobiography is a disguised performance' (Andrew Proudfoot, *At Last Sight*)" she applies the authorship of that line to Andrew. In one vital sense, of course, this is true. Andrew authored the line in performance. But the reference removes the line from its written origins ... it becomes only performative. This performative authoring continues through the essay: "In the room with her it is dark, and sshhhhh it is very, very late' (Liz Hague, *At Last Sight*); "He wants to touch her' (Chris Roberts, *At Last Sight*); "Am I doing this for your gaze? (Sarah Skelton, *At Last Sight*). No distinction is drawn between these lines and "I'm alone, it's quite sad really' (Andrew Proudfoot, *At Last Sight*" even though this line was doubly authored by the performer in a way that the previously cited lines were not.

The sub-text of Elizabeth's essay then is as focused on the event of performance as its title would suggest ... although its sub-textuality hinges on performative rather than spectatorial ownership. With an examination of the presentation in Liege, the essay itself articulates a concern with the specifics of *this* performance and at *that* time. That it addresses issues of watching through reference to the comments of particular spectators and not through a blanket assumption that any



one response was automatically shared by the audience *per se* is an indication of the student's sensitivity to the idiosyncratic nature of perception.

Chris Roberts' essay sets out to investigate the extent to which the selves of the performers informed *At Last Sight*. In precisely the same way as Elizabeth Hague, Chris apportions ownership of the text used in performers to s/he who speaks, rather than the writer of the work. This is evidenced most emphatically when Chris, in his endnotes, attributes words from the programme to Freeman, J. and words delivered by himself in the performance to Roberts, C.. From this separating out we can assume that Chris is regarding performed words as something distinct from words about performance, even when those words have been penned by the same hand. When Chris writes that the group were afforded the freedom to choose "the lines, stories, speeches and moments for ourselves", he seems to be developing this freedom into ownership.

Chris Roberts' essay moves into a reading of *At Last Sight* within a context created by Wilshire's article on paratheatrical form. In citing Wilshire, Chris begins an exploration of the extent to which *At Last Sight* tested the boundaries between 'theatre' and 'life'. Although Chris's essay does not touch on it directly, the issue here is one of consequence. Whereas events in life have ramifications beyond the event, it is usually the case that events in performance are removed from the consequences of any continued response. The actor playing Othello is unlikely to be berated in the bar for slaying Desdemona in performance. For Chris the performance brought about profound consequences. He ended one long-standing relationship and began another. His performative behaviour with Sarah

Robertson may turn out to be the most consequential act of his life. Certainly, the couple have become *the couple of At Last Sight*.

Sarah Robertson's essay begins with an assertion of Derrida's notion of 'writerly' and 'readerly' texts. Using this binary oppositionality, for Sarah at least, *At Last Sight* was writerly. Sarah recognises the fact that a move away from the conventional spectator/performer relationship may be more difficult for the spectator to adjust to than the performer: "audience members may feel more comfortable in the type of performance that restricts their behaviour, for example, where the fourth wall can serve as a protective device". Sarah's essay suggests that *At Last Sight* was more 'writerly' than I had believed. For Sarah "The intention of *At last sight (sic)* was that no interpretation should be ruled out." As my written comments on the essay indicate, my own feelings are that this is too liberal a reaction. I do not believe that any one interpretation of *At Last Sight* would be as valid as any other. In fact, we created the work with the intention of taking the audience along a journey towards a broadly shared interpretation. The work was not created out of chance and directorial decisions were made in pursuit of a particular resonance.

On Page 4 of her essay, Sarah quotes from the text and attributes the words to *At Last Sight*. On Page 9, four sections of text are quoted, with each being credited to the speaker/performer. On the same page, programme notes are attributed to freeman, J. (*sic*). There are two ways of looking at this. One is to regard it as an inconsistency and therefore a 'fault'; the other is to regard it as evidence of thinking, which is at once inconsistent *and* apposite. Thus, as the essay develops,



so does Sarah's position in relation to ownership. This may be no more than my own attempt at an interpretation of the essay that suits my overall view of both the work and the group. In the cold light of reflection it does seem to be unavoidably so. However, in my initial grading of the essay as the communication of thought I may be more critical (or critical in a different way) than when I now re-read the essay as a documentary artefact.<sup>47</sup> From my present perspective, I am more concerned with the thoughts contained in the essay than with the grammatical vagaries of communication.

'Truth and lies' form the basis of Sarah Skelton's essay. Like Chris Roberts, she refers to Bruce Wilshire; she also locates her own performative persona, and those of her fellow group members, within Michael Kirby's notion of a continuum of acting and not acting. The essay exposes the complexities involved in the idea of playing oneself. Referring to Andrew Proudfoot's invitation to any female spectator who so desires to meet him after the show for a drink, and whilst recognising that "Andrew almost certainly believes what he is saying to be true", Sarah nevertheless identifies Andrew's behaviour as actorly. In informing us that "Andrew is always aware of the presence of the audience and the fact that he is 'on stage'", Sarah points us towards the incontrovertible fact that Andrew is indeed "acting out his own emotions and beliefs ... for the sake of the audience."

In the middle of her essay, Sarah quotes Nietzsche's maxim that "truths are illusions we have forgotten are illusions." It is perhaps the most succinct way into *At Last Sight* that one could imagine. The fact that I did not point any of the group towards Nietzsche makes the integration of his words into the essay even more telling than had I referred to him during rehearsals. Where my own thesis is

seeking explanatory articulation *via* many tens of thousands of words, Nietzsche encapsulates all this and more in eight words. Ten thousand - fifteen thousand maybe - of mine for each one of his.

As with Sarah Skelton, Andrew Proudfoot attempts in his essay to explore truth and lies. For Andrew, and very interestingly, 'truth' is somehow inextricably caught up in spontaneity, so that the more a scene is rehearsed the less 'true' it becomes. Andrew's essay does not really explain why he believes this to be so, but as a document for my assessment *now* - now that I am no longer involved in an arithmetical assessment of the essay's 'worth' - it creates an exciting point of departure for new work. A truth twice told is less true the second time than it was on the first? A *matinee* is more truthful than a performance later that night, simply by dint of the fact of its status as 'prior'? The implications of this within performance are incredible. If truth recedes with each consecutive telling - and if 'truth' is an aim - then work must inevitably deteriorate from first rehearsal to performance. It seems to throw received wisdom on its head.

For Andrew, if my reading of his essay is reasonable, he feels that 'truth' happens once only and that what follows is the recreation of that same 'truth' in performance. As an example of this, he writes about a scene he had difficulties with, and the way that those difficulties were incorporated into the eventual playing out in public. As is to be expected in a relatively short essay, the issue is left unresolved, inasmuch as Andrew never explains why this might be so. Why a rehearsed 'truth' is less true than when it was unrehearsed. I think, perhaps, the issues here are of control and imitation. In the first instance (and I am referring



here to Andrew's problem scene) the difficulties are beyond his control. This is what leads to the difficulty. In the performance, these same difficulties are controlled in that they have been fashioned into that which is an imitation of its original state. There is a sense to this. A sense we can trace back to Plato and to Aristotle. It relates to those imitation theories of art, which have influenced for centuries the way we feel about perception. What it does not do is address the issue of truth as a state in itself.

If I rehearse the delivery of biographical details about myself, they are no less true simply because, as time passes, my phrasing becomes more polished or my body language more contrived. What potency do we afford to repetition when we say that its very process leads to the irretrievable dilution of truth?

**1-6-99**

The last of the students' essays to be discussed here is Glenn Robertson's, *Theatre is what Theatre Did*. This essay differs from his peers' in that it is an extension of a separate essay, *Theatre is what Theatre Does*, submitted for a taught module in Contemporary Theatre Practice. Glenn's essay differs also because it is the only one that does not credit words spoken in the performance to the performer.

In order to rationalise the lies told in the programme, Glenn cites Plato's belief that "the 'truth' of things did not lie in the way that they most directly appeared – not in the shadows on the cave wall ... but in the figures who cast them." This idea of truth as something that casts a shadow – the shadow of performance – is

central to Glenn's essay. He isolates a section of Andrew Proudfoot's emotional address to the audience as an obviously acted element, at the same time as he recognises that the relatively stilted delivery of this one line was disguised "in the way that a transition from 'acting' to 'non-acting' had already been made". For Glenn, what is of most interest is the fact that Andrew was using one truth (or one illusion of one truth) as a disguise for another. When Andrew delivered his personal plea, he did so in a way that allowed the audience as a mass to regard the words in one way, whereas he hoped that one specific spectator would recognise the words as aimed only at her. In this way, Andrew's 'truth' could be said to be the one thing he most wanted to conceal from most of the watchers. It was akin to the hiding of a tree in a forest. In offering up such an overtly generic 'truth', Andrew was concealing the specific truth at its core.

Taking his cue from the performance, Glenn allows his essay to answer nothing. As mentioned in my response to the rest of the students' essays, I am able to read their work in a different way now that the pressures of assessment have shifted from my role (then) as lecturer through to my role (now) as student. In this way, many of my initial criticisms of the essays have disappeared. Rather than regretting the absence of any coherent line of argument, I am inclined now towards an acceptance of the essay as a collection of thoughts. Where one thought gives way to another without ever going deeply into an analytical *rationale*, the thoughts are still valid. It is better, perhaps, that the students feel able to ask relevant and difficult questions than that they provide easy second-hand answers in response to the already long solved.



Whilst it is true to say that *At Last Sight* had a life before the students' involvement, it is also true that their perceptions of making the work have become part of *At Last Sight* itself. Their essays are appended to this thesis, not in order to make the group feel a part of this submission ... their involvement has been so total that their *not* feeling a part of it is unthinkable. The essays have been appended because they provide a valuable insight into the ways in which *At Last Sight* was made, and of the investigative spirit of that construction. Readers of this thesis are urged to consider their words not so much as written submissions for assessment but as traces of perception. Just as each of the students gave more to the practical project than could have ever been expected or asked, so each of their essays reveals an equally honest trawling of the self.<sup>48</sup>

In the same way that *At Last Sight* has been informed by a collapsing of issues of ownership, so this thesis is informed by the thoughts of its key personnel. As the last words before the thesis draws towards its conclusion, there has been evidence in this chapter of an accelerated concern towards a reading of the past of the project. Postmodernism would have it that whilst the past did indeed exist, knowing it today is an impossibility. All that we have to go on are the traces of the past and the way that we read them.



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<sup>1</sup> See Calvin, W. H. *How Brains Think: Evolving Intelligence, Then and Now*. HarperCollins, New York, 1997. p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*. Harper, New York, 1953. p. 89.

<sup>3</sup> Cage, J. *Conversing with Cage*. Richard Kostelanetz (ed.). Omnibus Press, London, New York, Sydney, 1989. p208.

<sup>4</sup> Savage-Rumbaugh, S. and Roger Lewin. *Kanzi: The Ape at the Brink of the Human Mind*. Wiley, 1994. pp. 111-112

<sup>5</sup> This is recognised by H. A. Simon in his study of 'trial and error leading to breakthrough', 'Scientific Discovery and the psychology of problem solving' in R. G. Colodny (ed.), *Mind and Cosmos: Essays in Contemporary Science and Philosophy*. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1966. pp. 73-86.

<sup>6</sup> Marcus, L. *Auto/Biographical Discourses*. Manchester University Press, UK, 1994. p. 180

<sup>7</sup> Guilford, J.P. 'Traits of Creativity' in *Creativity and its Cultivation*. H.H. Anderson (ed.) Harper, 1959. p.48

<sup>8</sup> J. P. Guilford in *Creativity*. McGraw-Hill, New York, 1967, pp. 110-133 proposes two general types of thinking: 'divergent thinking' and 'convergent thinking'. In convergent thinking the thinker is expected to 'converge' on the 'appropriate' answer to a problem. Convergent thinkers, therefore, have a preference for problems that require a single, correct answer. Divergent thinking, however, involves producing a variety of possible answers to a problem; thus, divergent thinkers prefer open-ended questions that allow for a range of possible answers. We can deduce from this (as we can from the making of *At Last Sight*) that the making of performance, which has no prescribed outcome, is suited to an approach where divergent thinking is allowed and encouraged.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Owens, A. *Mapping Drama*. Caryl Press, UK. To be published in 2000.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

<sup>11</sup> Craik, K. J.W. *The Nature of Explanation*. Cambridge University Press, 1943. P.98

<sup>12</sup> Grotowski, J. *Towards a Poor Theatre*. Methuen, London, 1969. p. 213.

<sup>13</sup> Mitter, S. *Systems of Rehearsal*. Routledge, London, 1992. p. 79.

<sup>14</sup> The consumption of alcohol by students as an assessed part of their studies raises some interesting ethical dimensions. University College Chester does not possess any published documents, either in terms of teaching or research that throw specific light onto this. The committee responsible for 'Ethics and Research' at Chester has stated that 'No activity should be entered into that causes – or intends to cause- harm or offence to the public'. Because the students are not, in this sense, regarded as members of the public, this *caveat* does not apply. A further statement from the committee informs staff that (wherever possible) 'Students should be advised of the content and nature of modules prior to commencement.' In this sense, my approach to working with this student-group falls within the regulatory guidelines. The fact that alcohol - particularly when consumed in the quantity and at the pace that it is – is a mind-altering substance does add complexity to the matter. I am Health and Safety trained and have been on a First Aid course at Chester; this, alongside my head of department's full knowledge of what is happening and the students' willing participation in the activity, means that I have done all that need be done in order for the work to go ahead.

Ethical issues of another kind are raised by the lies I am telling to members of the audience. This could be regarded as causing offence to members of the public. However, the fact that this 'public' needs to enter willingly into a theatre space in order then to read the programme and see the subsequent work changes their status, if only inasmuch as they are offering themselves as participants in a creative exercise, albeit without knowing the extent to which their own participation is crucial.

On an individual level, I have few, if any concerns about these matters. The spectators' unknowingness is an important element of the work and it is difficult to think of a way in which they could 'not know' and still not be lied to. Similarly, my interest in changing the physical conditions of the performance, and of the performers, contains within it the necessity to engage in practice that places the participants at some (very minor) risk, whether this be through exertion, duration or drink. It should be noted that I am always with the students when they drink alcohol in this piece, and that I am always sober.



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I am aware that the education sector is becoming increasingly aware of its responsibilities, both to its immediate clients and the wider community, and it is in this spirit that I offer the above observations.

I suspect, in defence of the work, that this module is the first time that the students involved have been put in a situation where ethical issues have been considered at any length. From this perspective, the approaches taken could be regarded as vital to their studies.

<sup>15</sup> Flaszén, L. in Mitter (1992). p. 89.

<sup>16</sup> The words were chosen by the members of the group, myself included. We all made suggestions, only retaining those on which we were all agreed.

<sup>17</sup> Mullins, S. *Lullaby*. Columbia/Sony Records. Sony Music, 1998

<sup>18</sup> The idea of Andrew trying to breathe water, rather than holding his breath, came from watching him in rehearsal. Holding his breath brought with it a sense of predictability: he would remain motionless for a minute or so, only to emerge gasping. Asking him to open his throat and gulp the water as though it were air means that Andrew's body is racked and he emerges retching. Watching Andrew doing this in rehearsal seemed somehow familiar, and then I remembered reading about a Chris Burden performance, *Velvet Water*, in *Chris Burden: Beyond The Limits*. Peter Noever (ed.), Cantz Verlag, Germany, 1996. Looking at the book in my office immediately after the rehearsal, I read the following statement by Burden: "Today I am going to breathe water, which is the opposite of drowning, because when you breathe water, you believe water to be richer, thicker oxygen capable of sustaining life." p. 164.

Because I had the idea without a *conscious awareness* of Burden's prior performance I can regard it as 'psychologically creative', as opposed to 'historically creative'. This is a distinction suggested by Margaret Boden in *Dimensions of Creativity*. Boden (ed.), MIT Press, Massachusetts, 1996. In Boden's words, "to be historically creative the novel product would have to be one that had never been seen or thought before. p. 17.

This raises the question of originality, and the extent to which something 'new' is also (*might* also be) something previously known ... *even to the secondary thinker*. I feel no less a sense of ownership of Andrew's drowning scene now that I am able to recall Burden's earlier project. The idea was not knowingly derivative. Seeing Andrew's work reminded me of reading about Burden's, not *vice versa*.

<sup>19</sup> The language tape also provides a thematic link with A. P. Hartley's words re the past being a foreign country, which are spoken by Glenn Robertson early on in *At Last Sight*.

<sup>20</sup> I have been unable to track down the title of the film in question. It was discovered at the end of a videotape, which has been recorded over so many times that the original material (part of a film shown on television) is impossible to date. The tape ends before the credits roll and the beginning is missing.

<sup>21</sup> 'Identity is not within us ... it exists only as narrative. The only way to explain who we are is to tell our own story, to select key events which characterise us and organise them to the formal principles of narrative .... This gives narration at large the potential to teach us how to conceive of ourselves.' In Currie, M. *Postmodern Narrative Theory*. Macmillan Press, UK, 1998. 'The Manufacture of Identities' pp. 17-32

<sup>22</sup> Althusser, L. *Lenin and Philosophy*. Trans. B. Brewster. New Left Books, London, 1975. p.31

<sup>23</sup> See Burchill, J. *Girls on Film*. Virgin Books, London, 1986 for an analysis of the ways in which women are consistently portrayed as passive in cinema. Michelene Wandor's *Look Back in Gender*. Methuen, London, 1987 provides an analysis of the same phenomenon in live performance.

<sup>24</sup> Sarah Robertson always took this photograph in performance, although the action was not rehearsed or 'blocked' in a way that made Sarah the most likely photographer.

Despite the relative freedoms offered within *At Last Sight* members of the cast tended to do much the same from one performance to the next. Actions that in the first instance were not directed, or even discussed, thus lost much of the appearance of spontaneity as the run of *At Last Sight* continued. Certain movements from certain performers became rigid, despite our best intentions to keep the work fluid. By the time these actions had become habitual, rather than improvisational (or by the time *I became aware of it*) the work was almost at an end.



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<sup>25</sup> Sarah Skelton's performance is the most overtly sexualised of the women's. This is a performative construction, which was developed through Sarah's own construction of self. *At Last Sight* has been created out of the performers' own notions of who they are and of what they wish to show. In this way, Sarah's desire to be seen as desirable (even more than her level of physical attractiveness) has resulted in a preponderance of on-stage actions which are suggestive of sexually charged encounters.

This is not to suggest that I have not had responsibility for the actions, words and images engaged in. As director of the work I have a considerable influence on the way that *At Last Sight* is both made and shown. Accordingly, I have to realise that the notions of self I am discussing might say as much about my projections as the performers'.

<sup>26</sup> A part of this urge to challenge came from my own concerns as a teacher, as much as from any directorial initiatives. I did not wish to be 'seen' as someone who shared in the spectatorial objectification of an attractive young woman.

<sup>27</sup> I am asking the male performers to carry out an action here, whereas with the **A B** scene between Andrew and Sarah I was happy to let the performers decide on the way the lines were divided between male and female. I do not, however, feel that this results in a contradiction. The 'pornography scene' works *because* those carrying out the actions are male, and this has as much to do with my decision as do any notions of directorial and gender-based power. It would only be *if* I thought that the women working the scene would be more effective than the men that my notions of manipulation would be questioned (and exposed perhaps as false). It should be pointed out that this idea of not asking females in the group to do certain things has more to do with my role as their teacher than as director.

<sup>28</sup> Volker, K. *Brecht*. Marion Boyars Ltd. London, 1991. Chapter 34 'A Great Time Wasted' pp. 369-376

<sup>29</sup> The 'text' can be said to be the work that is *At Last Sight*, this thesis and also myself. James Olney's *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*. Princeton University Press, USA, 1972 asserts that text is 'always a projection of the 'inner space' of the observing or conceiving self (and that) all forms of knowledge are in some way autobiographical' (p.3). It has not gone unnoticed that the intention to make *At Last Sight* self-revelatory has been transcended by the self-revelation that is this thesis. This is only in part to do with the collaborative nature of making the performance as opposed to the solitary practice of writing these words. Fundamentally, I feel, it is about the fact that 'you must have a self before you can afford to deconstruct it.' Jouve, N. W. *White Woman Speaks with Forked Tongue: Criticism as Autobiography*. Routledge, New York and London, 1991. p.7. The creation of *At Last Sight* has thus provided a creating self that this thesis is able to deconstruct.

<sup>30</sup> Brecht commented that 'In practice the theatre does not fulfil its social function. At a time like this the really practical talents are relegated to the field of theory in order to remain active.' Volker, 1991. p.106. Whilst I would take exception to Brecht's use of the term 'relegated', his words are as relevant today (perhaps more so) as they were at the time of writing.

<sup>31</sup> 'Slippage' may be literal in this sense. After draining litres of wine and then spinning wildly there is every possibility that some of the performers will slip and fall. The only safeguard against injury is that the cast members know that they can stop their actions at any time they choose. The context of the performance allows and even encourages this.

<sup>32</sup> I am aware here that I am making assumptions about an audience, which is a trap I would normally wish to avoid. In this case the assumption seems a reasonable one to make, based not least on the evidence of Liege.

<sup>33</sup> This is a crucial aspect. In assigning a distinction between the 'real' and the 'false' I am seeming to ignore those same theories of 'constructedness' that I elsewhere embrace. This is problematic, and yet to deny it, to state that all aspects of the work are as 'false' as each other, would be to ignore those very notions that brought me to the work in the first place. Essentialism is not a fashionable term. Its insistence that there is something 'real' has been argued against so cogently that, on an intellectual level, I am convinced of its internal contradictions. I cannot help but wonder, however, whether Baudrillard would regard it as 'real' or not if he stubbed his toe on the edge of his bed and cried out in pain. This may be a facetious example, but the fact remains that I do believe in the existence of the real: *At Last Sight* is founded on that belief, no less than it is founded on a desire to explore the distinctions between the real and the false in performance. Indeed, if there were no distinction between one and the other, then what would be the point of any artists making work that abandons illusion? When Abramovic and Ulay walked the Wall of China



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it was the reality of the action that gave it currency, no less than when Chris Burden was crucified to the bonnet of his Volkswagen. Conversely, we can say that exposing artifice only succeeds as a premise if one accepts that the act of exposure is somehow *less artificial* in nature than that which is being exposed.

I began this thesis by talking about the absence of my children as a catalyst for a work that dealt with loss, it is the *truth* of these feelings that provides a context within which the rest of the work is able to function. Perhaps it is my belief in the truth of feelings that is more important than any faith I might have in facts over fictions. The emotional content of *At Last Sight* (and the emotional content of this thesis) is a testament (at least to myself) of the truth of feelings. This has been developed into ideas, such as the consumption of alcohol, which stand as 'truthful' in and of themselves, rather than solely as metaphors for 'truthful' origins.

I can accept that my 'life' is made up of constructions, without accepting that my life is not 'real'. *At Last Sight* is an attempt at making art out of this. The 'loss' in the performance of time passing is not designed to stand in some equation to the loss of children to a father, but its elements of (at least) reduced illusion are necessary counterpoints to the overt illusion of reading lines of text in lieu of natural(istic) behaviour.

There is a reality to the fact of performers in a space, carrying out actions at a certain time, but this is not the *only* reality of the performance. The investment in the work is personal and it matters. The distinctions between real and false may mean more to me than to any spectator, and more than they do to the performers, but they do exist. If art is a part of life, rather than a representation of it, then why should art be denied the same freedoms as life? *At Last Sight* was fuelled by the real and has now become a part of my reality. Howsoever we engage with the theories of the day, we live our lives with the intrinsic and *essentialist* regard for the real. What price parenthood if feelings are not real? What price this thesis if its words are false?

<sup>34</sup> Hutcheon, L. *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. Routledge, London, 1988. p.117

<sup>35</sup> Kirby, M 'On Acting and Not Acting' in *Acting (Re)Considered*. Routledge, London, 1995. pp. 43-58

<sup>36</sup> Clark, R & Ivanic, R. *The Politics of Writing*. Routledge, London & New York, 1997. p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> The three works in question were directed respectively by my colleagues Ian Watson, Adrian Guthrie and Matt Wellings.

<sup>38</sup> I am aware, with hindsight, that the sessions I spent at the computer during this period resulted in relatively large sections of text. It seems that at the very time I had a lot to say about the way the work was proceeding I had very little time to say it.

<sup>39</sup> For a focus on the role of spectatorship, see Beckerman, B. *Theatrical Presentation*, Routledge, London, 1990 and Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences*, Routledge, London, 1994.

<sup>40</sup> This 'stumbling' also occurred when Chris stumbled and fell during a prolonged bout of mid-performance drinking. He drank a litre of wine, spun vigorously and fell to the ground. When he regained his footing he had no idea where he was in relation to the spectators, and he began speaking to Glenn as though he were a member of the audience.

<sup>41</sup> I use the term 'best' here to describe this performance of *At Last Sight* as the closest it came in approximation to the intentions I developed during the rehearsal process.

<sup>42</sup> These essays were handed in on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1999, which was the deadline for all of the Year 3 students following this production module. The fact that the students involved in *At Last Sight* had less post-production time to compose the essays than their peers almost certainly pushed them towards an investigation of the processes that had taken them through the module rather than a concentration on the performances *per se*. As a second marker on students' essays from across the year I am aware that this focus on process was not common.

I might like to think that the *At Last Sight* group would have written their essays this way in any case, but it is likely that the shortage of time to reflect on their assessed performances was a major contributory factor in the way their essays were approached.

<sup>43</sup> The students involved gave their approval to their essays being included here in an appendix. University regulations mean that I can do so only if their grades are not published. Rather than asking the students to submit new copies of the essays, I have included the originals, with my written comments intact, although no grades are shown. I do this because the essays, in the context



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of this thesis, form part of an ongoing dialogue. My responses to the students' work are as much a part of this thesis as are any other words.

<sup>44</sup> By this I mean that the students' documentation of their processes may be more 'honest' than my own. There are times when I have been aware of manipulating the documentation to suit a theoretical perspective of my choosing, rather than of finding the most pertinent words and theories to match the practice. The students' essays reveal varying grasps of an 'appropriate vocabulary' ... what they all share is an immediacy that my own (more studied) words might sometimes deny. I am using an example of practice to engage with a theoretical work, whereas the students, I believe, have used their understanding of theory to engage with the practice.

<sup>45</sup> The essays were marked quickly, firstly by myself and subsequently by two of my colleagues. Three of the essays were passed on to an external examiner, who returned them on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1999. The external examiner agreed the internal marks and in one case increased the grade.

If the haste of the internal grading system seems to augur against contemplative critical reading it is important to note that it was entered into as a consequence of rapidly approaching examination boards.

<sup>46</sup> *University College Chester Drama Handbook*. UCC Press, 1997

<sup>47</sup> I make no apologies for this. The essay, as part of an undergraduate submission, is not read in the same way as it is as a piece of the jigsaw of *At Last Sight* that is this thesis.

<sup>48</sup> The students' essays are more than a contribution to the documentary *information* of this thesis. The essays' inclusion passes part of the ownership of this thesis over to them. That the students are making a contribution to the written submission of this thesis illustrates something of their importance, and it gives that importance permanence.

Just as I have been both subject and observer so too have the students. Their responsiveness to the nature of the work has taken *At Last Sight* into directions that I could never have anticipated and their contributions have been creative and intelligent.

Every maker of any performance knows that the work could not be the work that it is with different personnel. That is the nature of collaboration. *At Last Sight* would have been the same in name only with different performers. That the group's involvement has gone deeper still than these words suggest should be apparent in every section of the thesis.



## Conclusion

24-9-99

*At Last Sight* is now finished. 'Finished' is not an easy term. It is loaded. It carries with it all of the implications of practice as something fleeting and time-based at the same time as it suggests a clean delineation of process into product and thence into past. Inasmuch as the work of performance was always going to be an *event* and not an *object*, this is certainly true. 'It' happened. And having happened is now gone and gone forever. This provides me with a little distance ... a suitable distance. A necessary distance.

This distance allows the conclusion to begin with a recognition of *At Last Sight* as a part of history, at the same time as notions of 'history' will be somewhat undermined. Later paragraphs will articulate the position on performance as research which has been arrived at during the course of this project.

The work of *At Last Sight* is now history. As such, and as the last piece of performance work I had any responsibility for making in the Twentieth Century, it is consigned, in my own small orbit of practice, to the world of the previous millennium. To the world of the gone. This imbues the piece with an accompanying status. A label. *At Last Sight* was a project central to my research. It follows then, if only within the narrowness of my own experience, that it has become a part of my reading of theatre history. Whereas the *performance* is past, the reading of that performance, of this thesis, is always in the present. It is thus

history made known in the here and now. It is theatre scholarship through theatre history.

There is nothing 'wrong' with theatre history *per se*. It is only through a viewing of the past, we might say, that we are able to make any valid sense of our present: that we can locate our present activities as part of a continuum of practice. It is also the case that theatre history, *via* the calcification of living form into prescribed fact, has a responsibility for much that is recognisably sterile in current practice. The history of theatre is a positive (and indeed inevitable thing) but its pervasive influence can turn out to be negative. Which means that my own reading, and re-working, of the history of *At Last Sight* needs to be approached with considerable caution and no little care.

**25-9-99**

There are two problems with theatre history. The first one of these is the way in which that history has been and continues to be written; for the manner of much of this writing impacts to a serious degree on how the past is read and employed. And that is where the second problem is located, because the very nature of theatre's history is that it is, or was, primarily shown rather than written about. This is not to suggest that theatre is about the activity of organised looking without thought, of an immediacy which belies reflection ... to even hint at that would be to undercut the ethos which is at the core of this thesis. We would do well in fact to remember that, etymologically, theatre and theory share the same source, *theatron*, meaning where to look.<sup>1</sup> What does need to be guarded against, however, is the idea of the written past as some sort of foolproof blueprint for work of the future. Descriptions of creativity do not teach us how to create, any more than books that



are the product of deep thought show us how to think. By the same token, the study of theatre history is an insidious way of filtering the past, of telling us, of *teaching us* what it is important to remember. Of shaping and classifying works into recognisably coherent genres. Of pigeonholing. It also, through a process of omission, tells us what we should not remember ... what is not worth remembering. It teaches us dismissal with the same words that it uses when it asks us to embrace.

Theatre historians - and I write this because the reflective nature of these words is threatening to make me a part of that which I most fear - create a lens through which they, and subsequently we, view theatre. This lens is both selective and subjective ... it is a subjectivity, furthermore, which is dressed up in the clothes of an assumed objectivity. It focuses in on a work and in so doing blocks that vital periphery of vision which would otherwise exist. What we are presented with is a narrow tract of history; a personalised reading that masquerades as a view of the way things really were. Inevitably, that has been the case with all of the words I have written to bring the reader to this point. All that I can hope is that by embracing the notion of subjectivity, by a relentless utilisation of the personal pronoun 'I' rather than the ubiquity of 'one', I have avoided, at least in part, the pitfalls of seeming to proffer an unchallengeable truth.

The history of theatre provides us with a terminology ... a terminology which often appears as a litany of movements, of an identifiable idea of 'progress'. Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, Modernism, Absurdism, Kitchen Sink, Political, Situationism, Feminism, Agit-Prop, Popular, Community, Invisible, Intercultural, Intracultural, Forum, Functional, Reminiscence, Documentary, Celebratory, Postmodernism,



Performance Art, Happenings, Live Art ... the list, even of Twentieth Century terms, is seemingly inexhaustible. A procession of departures, each one defined by its distinctiveness from the rest. The terms are offered and perpetuated through the creation of a consensus. This over-simplification of tendencies into 'movements' disguises a far more complex reality. Most of us have been taught to believe that there were 'great' and 'classic' works of any given period: *Ubu Roi*, *Rhinoceros*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Mother Courage*, *Look Back in Anger*, we could choose from a really rather narrow field. Just as Jarry, Beckett, Brecht and Osborne are seen as lasting paradigms for their age ... and also, through that peculiar conceit of 'Theatre', as voices that continue to speak to our own present. What this canonisation does, whether by default or design, is provide us with a limited view of the same periods it purports to describe. If we consider work of the 1930s and 40s we can see that it is not in fact epitomised by the theatre of Brecht; just as British theatre of the mid-1950s was not exclusively determined by the programme at The Royal Court and the pen of Kenneth Tynan. We know how selectively theatre history remembers, at the same time as our shelves bow to the weight of the tomes in which that selective memory has been enshrined. The names of the great and the good function as little more than co-ordinates of a fraudulently received version of the past. Their larger than life status casts shadows over much that is equally worthy of consideration.

In recognition of this, I should stress that *At Last Sight* is not being historicised in this thesis in order that any future reader might come to regard the work as being emblematic of a particular 'style' or movement within Higher Education. If the practical production was reflective of anything it was of an eclecticism-in-denial; of



an appropriation and *assemblage* which took little heed of the restraints of cultural anchorage and/or heritage.<sup>2</sup>

28-9-99

The lens of historical perspective is both a way of seeing, to borrow John Berger's term, and a way of not seeing.<sup>3</sup> Of both inclusion and exclusion. With the exception of Barba's 'living links': the embodied and learned techniques of, for example, Japanese Noh theatre, when we look back at eras that happen to lie beyond personal memory and experience we become ultra-dependent on the gaze which is permitted by the borrowed lens of Theatre History.<sup>4</sup> This happens to the point where that which is not seen, that which has not been written about and subsequently bound, ceases to exist. Where the lens tells us which work we should know, remember, admire and emulate. This restricted view of the past cannot but fail to restrict the view we have of the present, whilst the wider terminology of theatre brings its own weight to bear, so that words such as 'significant' and 'logical' are regarded as good, whilst 'insignificant' and 'illogical' are held to be bad. We could chase this list down, taking to task such commonplace words of theatre-debate as 'coherent' and 'convention', to the point where the terms we use to describe the thing we practice are exposed as being firmly entrenched in value judgements. Judgements so deep as to have become seen now as part of the very fabric of theatre itself.

Theatre is neither so easily nor so rigidly defined. Theatre is the use of words (sometimes) and actions (sometimes) in a constantly evolving variety of contexts. Theatre is not so rarefied, nor is it so special as the language of theatre implies. It is at once a profession, an academic subject, a pastime, a medium, a form of

address, a spectacle, an event, a means of communication something, anything, to someone, even to the self. It is used everywhere, at varying levels of complexity. It is at work everywhere where there are people.<sup>5</sup> And yet the history of theatre, 'Theatre History', does not work this way. It operates within the same set of restrictive definitions - or different definitions that lead to the same restrictions. Contemporary performance, we would be led to believe by many historians, is a professional practice with its roots in the modernist avant-garde. As such, it is subject to measurement according to comparison. By its very definition then, theatre history is in the business of creating boundaries: on one side we are presented with 'High Art', while on the other side we are offered 'Low Art'. On one side is professional theatre, on the other is amateur; on one side is the mainstream and on the other the marginal. The practical reality is one of parallel developments, progressions and regressions, cul de sacs, confusions and conceits. Ideas of seamless progress and neat categorisations are fundamentally false.

For theatre history to have any real worth, it should be striving for a more inclusive definition of performance, alongside a more inclusive way of looking at performance ... a way which recognises 'theatre' as one element of 'performance', rather than seeing the two as oppositional and competing factors. For if the theatre of the twentieth century can be defined in terms of any one unifying theme, then that theme is of an insatiable quest for the new. It is a theme of influence and rejections, of cross-fertilisation and the hybridisation of different practices. This creates a splintering of views which cannot be packaged off into a tidy coherence of discrete 'styles'.



Theatre history presents us with the past of theatre as a parade of events turned into artefacts, each with its own date, director, author and location within a specific movement or 'ism'. This thesis may not be so immune to that as it wishes. The word 'postmodernism' has already peppered its pages, and continues so to do. But whilst each historian's artefact creates the marking of a point in the progression of theatrical sensibility, it is hoped that this thesis does something else ... something rather more than this. Theory, after all, is a 'schema of explanation according to which a diversity of phenomena are accorded a significance'.<sup>6</sup> Seen in this light, this thesis is theory in action. A work where phenomena encountered along the route towards performance are regarded without hierarchical judgement, and where findings are always discovered in the interconnected here and nows of making and of writing.

Just as *At Last Sight* as a live performance in either Liege, Chester or Compiègne cannot be adequately replicated in the writing and subsequent reading of this thesis, so the formal evaluation of work which was unseen in its intended manifestation remains problematic. As Peggy Phelan has warned us, many 'performance critics realize that the labor to write about performance ... is also a labor that fundamentally alters the event.'<sup>7</sup> That which looks a certain way on paper may have looked different in performance. Published words last long after individual memories fade and Higher Education is filled with lecturers speaking borrowed 'truths' (those Kosuthian residues of ideas) to students who will then go on to perpetuate these self-same claims. I speak to my students of cultural differences between Eastern and Western performance and, notwithstanding a modicum of directly experiential evidence, I will often find myself passing on the thoughts of

Schechner and Barba, out of Turner and Savarese, as though their published words stand somehow as a proven truth. At best, this is a fourth-hand notion by the time the student comes to formulate a responsive thought. I speak of Brecht, who died before my birth, as though the words of Willett and Esslin were in some way metamorphosed into my own.<sup>8</sup> The permanence of the ink and the weight of the publishing house transforming the historian's view into 'fact'.

Work made with students is rarely given this type of permanence. Despite the world of critical thought within which such work has its origins, there is a lack of critical commentary and documentation. Writing about performance made with students can seem like a suspect task. And so student-performance becomes mute. As an assessable component of students' work at University College Chester, *At Last Sight* itself was not 'marked', although all of the Year Three students were. As I have stated earlier I am not at liberty to publish their grades in this work, but I can attest to a department-wide recognition of the students' achievements. By this I mean that the marks awarded for performances within *At Last Sight* were high. This may seem somewhat surprising when one considers the assessment criteria for 'Performance' that were in operation at University College Chester in June 1999 when the students' marks were negotiated, agreed and awarded. I make these comments in order to stress here some of the difficulties of assessing certain types of performance according to guidelines which are written in an agenda-specific way.

For example, 'First Class' performance work is expected to be demonstrative of excellence which is evidenced through 'expressive control of voice', 'role or roles



fully realised and maintained', 'sustained concentration throughout' and an ability to 'seize and maintain focus throughout'. None of these elements were present in the performances relating to *At Last Sight*, whereas the criteria for the lowest 'Pass' mark, which I include here in their entirety, are those which were directed into the work

Pedestrian and lacking in confidence. Although real effort is made there is a failure to demonstrate style or focus. May be uncomfortable to watch and communicate insecurity. Does not give appropriate support to fellow performers. Mistakes may be made and acknowledged. Lacking in expressivity and awareness. May inadvertently upstage. Slow in response and uncertain.

What the expectations of 'First Class' and 'Pass' work reveals is itself an articulation of a received wisdom which does not stand up to challenge. The students at Chester – the human material of *At Last Sight* – are told that 'excellent' work is implicitly role-driven and focused, whilst weak work is visibly insecure and inexpressive. The criteria make too strong a contribution to the idea of absolutes. Of a right and a wrong way of making work, which not only impacts on the ways in which those students are taught but also on the views of performance they carry with them beyond graduation. There is no mention in the criteria of appropriateness; principally, I feel, because it is neither quantifiable nor fixed.

Colleagues in the department at Chester were supportive of the six students' work on *At Last Sight* in spite of the criteria rather than according to it.

**1-10-99**

This criticism (for such it is) of the assessment procedures in place at University College Chester has nothing to do with my own predilections towards one way of



working over another. My concern is not so much with issues of the marginal (whatever that is) set in opposition to the mainstream (whatever that may be), as it is with the imposing on students (and staff) of what amounts to a type of half-hidden hierarchy. By this I mean the predisposition towards certain approaches to performance, which are deemed 'more acceptable' than others, without that same agenda being made overt. It is possible to compare works that fall under one heading, perhaps 'Modernism', with others which are influenced more directly by 'Postmodernism', but these comparisons need to be made in a non-hierarchical spirit. In essence (and here this thesis plunges once again into those very 'isms' which the first few paragraphs of this conclusion sought to refute) I can say that *At Last Sight* was a postmodern piece. The postmodern aspects of the work were never intended as a departure from modernism *per se*, so much as an implicit denial of that faith in the power of the present and the yet-to-be which has become synonymous with modernism, *as it is generally taught*.<sup>9</sup> Where modernism can be seen (through that morally complex historicising lens) as an attempt to replace the nineteenth century's glorification of the past with a twentieth century optimism, postmodernism is conversely identified by an infatuation or obsession with the past. *At Last Sight*'s starting obsession with my own past – which constituted a pleading for redemption without an accompanying offering up to change – was in this way steadfastly postmodern. No solutions, no functionalism, not even any real and identifiable trace of idealism.

Artists working through modernist beliefs invented new formal languages that changed not just the way theatre looked, but the way in which spectators were encouraged to see.<sup>10</sup> Modernism then can be seen as no less than an attempt,



through theatre and other art forms, to change the world. It was both a success and a failure. Even the most absurd and abstract of practitioner/philosophists, the futurists, dadaists and surrealists, like so many more to follow, believed that theatre had a responsibility to carry a new message. Even in the midst of mayhem there lurked an undercurrent of functionalism. A belief in the capacity of performance, art, literature and architecture to bring forth change. The aesthetic aspects of the modernists' message were carried forward successfully. And that very success may be modernism's failure ... its ultimate irony. We have learned modernism by rote, and we go on to repeat that mantra as faithfully as the words of *The Lord's Prayer* spoken in chorus in a classroom assembly. Modernism failed because its spirit of optimism was lost and with it went any claim to potency. Its impotence rises to the surface in every *verfremdungseffekt* that no longer defamiliarises; in every political play which fails to persuade (and which fails even to persuade its cast). It became a Communion Mass learned by disbelievers: a ritual as empty as a ticketed trip through the Holocaust Theme Park.<sup>11</sup> The *zeitgeist* shifts and all that we have left are historians' words. Bound and binding.

When postmodern performance feeds off modernism it does so with less hypocrisy than modernism shows when it feeds off itself. If work is to be parasitic in nature then let that nature be exposed for what it is. It is a singularly one-sided relationship. The parasite, the maker of work, does not care what the host subject thinks or thought. It treads over the politics and philosophy of the past ... which, at any rate, can never fully match up to its own. Modernism is exposed as nostalgia, and so it succumbs to its very own *bete noir*. In displaying a pessimistic *mien* in lieu of hope, postmodernism seeks to provide itself with the luxury of



dealing with sentimentality without at the same time seeming sentimental. It is difficult to think of a more appropriate framework to put around work that deals with love and loss. Postmodern performance thrives on our collective and individual experiences of a theatrical past, and all conventions employed are themselves only ever the hand-me-downs of work seen.

Theatre history, badly used, reduces all things to names as names-of-note. Two books, published in consecutive years by the same publisher, Routledge, achieve precisely this, offering theatre history as a succession of sound bites. *Twentieth Century Theatre: A Sourcebook*, edited by Richard Drain, consists of five sections: 'The Modernist Dimension', 'The Political Dimension', 'The Popular Dimension', 'The Inner Dimension' and 'The Global Dimension'. The book contains "key texts by renowned writers",<sup>12</sup> placing them in chapters deemed logical by the editor. *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, edited by Michael Huxley and Noel Witts, adopts a different format, listing practitioners alphabetically and thus allowing its readers to create their own categorisations. Where Drain's editing prescribes, Huxley's and Witt's provokes. In so doing it at once encourages the creation of those notions of hybridity and idiosyncratic contextualisation which are at the core of contemporary work. Because, at least in part, it avoids imposing its own 'reading' on the reader, it is theatre history that does not, by its nature, seek to create an authoritative history of theatre.

**2-10-99**

This conclusion is not intending to take the form of a book review. That is not the business of this work. But the stuff of theatre past is an intrinsic historicisation wherein careers of shifting practice are metamorphosed into systems and schools.



A necessary aspect of my own analytical reflection on *At Last Sight* is the extent to which this project - which was always an amalgamation of my own previous and less coherent productions - will now become the marketplace where I shop for 'new' ideas. The point of these paragraphs then, is not to argue against the appropriation of ideas, any more than it is to argue against influence. Cross-fertilisation is an important and legitimate aspect of the ways in which performances are made and culture functions. What I *am* doing here is making explicit my recognition that a tendency exists, certainly within my own way of making work, to, as it were, cash in on history. To take ideas which once seemed radical and re-use them with no attendant re-interpretation. Which is *not* the same thing as reference. Reference means just that, that one refers to something, that ideas of the contemporary and ideas from or of the past clash and spark and make something which is at once recognisable and fresh. That seems to be the strength of postmodernism.

And just as postmodernism has an obligation to learn from the past, to interrogate its ideas, rather than endlessly repeating them, regurgitated and reframed, so it is vital that *At Last Sight*, my own past, is not reduced, in work to come, to an alternative to new ideas. What is needed is an investigation of the varied strategies and ideas of the work and not its stylistic trickery. What is needed of work gone is not simply that it is perpetually re-questioned, but that we ask the *right* questions.

And what are these questions? They should be the questions that cannot be answered by the work alone ... questions that cannot necessarily be addressed directly or empirically, but which are elusive. They are questions such as: What is it

about this particular performance that we cannot understand because we are not a part of the culture or *zeitgeist* in which it was created? What is it that we *can* understand precisely because we are not the target group ... what aspects of the work have become visible to *my* eyes? What did the performance seek to communicate to its audience and *why*? What was the relationship between intention and result? Was the performance an example of ‘good’ theatre of the time or ‘bad’? What types of theatre were considered good or bad, or exciting or banal at that time? At *this* time? Richard Foreman has offered the apposite statement that “The spectator’s question should not be, ‘What does this play mean?’ The question should be, ‘In response to which of the world’s possibilities and tensions is this play created?’”<sup>13</sup>

**3-10-99**

Good theatre history then should be interested in the finished product not as a point of closure or culmination, but as one stage along a continuum of process. It is because of this that theatre history has an obligation to consider the fringes of practice as well as the award-winning mainstream ... to look to work which might all too easily be regarded as insignificant. It is not enough that our published notions of marginal performance are almost exclusively limited to the marginal-made-mainstream. To Robert Wilson and The Wooster Group, to Impact Theatre Co-Operative, The People Show and Forced Entertainment ... to the formerly esoteric as the television chat show guest.

Theatre history, I would argue, needs to be something that does not see itself as being anything other than a history of ideas. Good theatre history then is not really concerned with a history of theatre at all. It is a history of ideas and therefore of



culture ... two of the most precious elements to be found in Higher Education. It is not a barely changing roster of names, etched in stone, as though Twentieth Century theatre were the sole province of the famous names from Stanislavski through to LeCompte, it is the history of how we each have come to believe the things we do about theatre. If this reads like an advert for a Liberal Arts approach then so be it. As the project of *At Last Sight* took form as part of an undergraduate programme and draws to a close as a doctoral thesis it is hardly inappropriate if the philosophy that drives the language of the performance is now allowed to drive the language of the page. Good theatre history is good theatre scholarship, and it should act as a catalyst for our own ideas. Good theatre scholarship says, this is how somebody thought about his or her work *then*, and this is how that work was born out of their own culture. The question such scholarship asks is this (and only ever this): What can you do?

If this thesis achieves this, then in doing so it has provided a contribution to knowledge that is fundamental to the study of Theatre at this time and also at times to come. Words remain long after memories fade. This thesis has many aspects. It is the chronicling of a project, from inception to production; the charting of an example of performance practice as performance research; the publication of that which would otherwise remain as ephemeral as the time taken by spectators to take to their seats and then to applaud; as the analysis of a particular process of making work, including a rationale for words written as performance text and also for directional input; as a chronicle of work that has been overtly driven by the demands of a specific curriculum and which has, in its own turn, been influenced by the 'accident' of modules undertaken as a student myself, of performances seen

and read about, of conversations and criticisms, of the inexplicable and the explained at length, of reflection and supervision, of revision and immediacy.

Whereas *At Last Sight* has functioned, at least in some ways, as a peg on which this thesis hangs, rather than operating as an assessable element of the overall submission, the thesis has constituted an attempt at defining a position on the nature of research-driven practice. This is one of the struggles of university theatre in our time: to have practice afforded the status of research. This thesis functions in part then as a mechanism through which a personal example of this struggle is being reported.

Issues of status do not just affect research as practice: the status of the researcher is also an element (if one has a proven and established track record in research then 'similar' outcomes from 'dissimilar' forms may be more readily accepted). The position adopted by the researcher is equally important, making the publication of 'knowledge' *via* practice a complex outcome to determine. At Brunel University, where I am registered for the period of this research, the situation regarding practice-based research was articulated thus in an open e-mail to the SCUDD

Mailbase

'practice-based' ... refers to things like the EdD and EngD where a substantial element of the doctorate is about professional practice - almost denoting work-based activities .... this is not to be confused with what we mean by the words 'practice based'. Practice, in the widest sense of performance/artefact, and the theorising around it, which we permit for our PhD at Brunel ... does present a challenge to the definition of research and



to the idea of credit which the QAA is applying at doctoral level.

2) the QAA want to defend the PhD as research based, but will quite explicitly allow this award where the artefact or other form of work is accompanied by a 'written explanation that is examined'. It is only when the artefact or performance is the sole outcome that the PhD is not available. There is no indication ... of word count in relation to this 'written explanation'. There has to be a rationale in place of course, but the weighting of performance to written explanation is something that is determined by each individual PhD.<sup>14</sup>

As part of an ongoing debate as to the possibilities for practice to be credited as research *per se*, the communication from Brunel is interesting. Whilst it offers succinct advice and a large amount of creative freedom to a PhD student researching under its own institutional auspices it also highlights the problem for artists working within academic structures. For the purposes of QAA, practice is afforded a type of validity *only* when it is subsequently 'explained' in written text. For researching practitioners this is something of a handicap, inasmuch, at least, as one needs to demonstrate an ownership of the 'product' which is of both creative *and* intellectual worth. For the purposes of PhD this seems appropriate ... the thoughts contained within the submission need to be capable of a dissemination which is coherent and permanent. But for practice engaged in with undergraduates the situation remains vexed. Processes undertaken in the creation of public performance are unlikely to be written down in anything like a systematic fashion. Indeed, the process of *making* almost augurs against *writing*. And I speak from the experiences gained during the process of creating *At Last Sight*. The making and writing *are* compatible and mutually enriching, but the activity of making work in and with a group can, at its most telling times, be so intense as to eat into the time

put aside to write. The pressure to present is always in the present, and the pressure to publish follows. Writing has a life of its own and the gap between that which is being made and the words that explain it can be wider than the researcher would care to admit.

What I have been afforded through the process of making this work – the thesis and the production – has been a position of experience that may be of some benefit to other researchers within the field of performance. The words to come are offered as an encapsulation of that experience, rather than as an ‘explanation’ of *At Last Sight*. What follows then is an attempt at outlining the area of practice as research, both as it has applied to my own experience and as it appears as a wider issue for colleagues elsewhere. In this way, the micro of *At Last Sight* feeds into the macro of practice as research. It does so through the case study of an otherwise culturally invisible work. If there are times when the language of this chapter seems to move too readily towards generalisations and the dread of ‘universal truths’, it does so from a need to widen the scope of what has been an otherwise tightly focused study.

**6-10-99**

We know that a debate concerning the accreditation as research for performance has raged in recent years. Out of this debate, a feeling has emerged that the event of performance should, in certain situations, be afforded the validity of research. What it is that defines one ‘situation’ from another is the key area of debate. What, for example, makes one piece of work ‘research-driven’ and another not so? In fulfilling its obligation to address that question, this chapter will function as both



conclusion and introduction: tidying up the slippage of my own processes and offering a point of departure for others.

7-10-99

The differences between Theatre *study* and Theatre *training* still exists. They are many, but we might say that chief among them is that the former looks at *why* decisions are made, whilst the latter concentrates on *how* those decisions are carried out in performance. It is a crude but nonetheless useful distinction, with some considerable bearing on the ways in which notions of practice as research have been regarded. Where practical work, or performed output, is prioritised, theory may find little room; where theoretical study is the aim, practice may be regarded as no more than a 'playing'. A small number of Drama departments at British universities are moving away from the assessment of practice, and, whilst this movement is regarded by some as a response to questions of quality assurance rather than as a positional shift which is supported by a persuasive philosophy, its significance should not be overlooked. What this is saying to students on its courses in Drama is that practice in and of itself is not commensurate with the presentation for assessment of thinking that is deep and analytical.

This looks likely to achieve two things: it will widen further still the gulf between scholars and practitioners, which the *industry* of commercial theatre is already predisposed towards.<sup>15</sup> And it will reduce the belief in the potency of performance as its own expressive language which is *in need of no further explanation*.

I shall deal with these issues in order. It is a fact of life, rather than a rumour, that students graduating from accredited Drama Schools in Britain, who are also



graduates of academic Drama programmes at universities, are advised by many of their Drama School tutors and agents not to mention their academic histories to casting agencies and directors.<sup>16</sup> The logic of this advice is clear. Directors are looking for practitioners: they want doers, not thinkers. The British tradition of 'intellectual' directors and 'instinctive' actors is clear for all to see. Directors are also scholars, whereas actors are not. The exceptions to this rule do little to affect the overall picture. It is rare to find a mainstream director of influence who is not also a graduate.<sup>17</sup> Notwithstanding their much greater number, it is rare to find a mainstream actor who is a graduate (or who broadcasts this history). The difference is no less pronounced in British cinema and television. Whilst the American system does not provide an exact parallel, inasmuch as a college or university education is more commonplace than in Britain, the American film actor and director, Sean Penn, has likened directors to hammers and actors to nails.<sup>18</sup> It is a violent image, but one which is nevertheless apt within a profession (an industry) that sees the ideal performer as somebody both 'beautiful' and 'stupid'.

To stop students from 'doing' practice as a part of their assessable academic programme is to perpetuate the myth that separates out instinct and analysis. This is not to argue for students' performances to demonstrate no more than a technical accomplishment, so that a juggler keeping three objects in the air is seen as weaker than s/he who juggles with four. Technical accomplishment in terms of the craft of performance is much more the stuff of drama schools than of university departments. What performances within academic departments can and should provide are opportunities for students and staff to engage in research through practice. This remains the principle distinction between the types of 'training'



offered to students, and it is precisely why universities have provided professional 'experimental' or 'alternative' theatre companies with so many of their core members.<sup>19</sup>

This brings us to the second danger. The mainstream has operated on something of a policy of exclusion with regard to Drama graduates, but this exclusion is in no way one-sided. Students who have spent three years engaged in critical thinking about and *through* theatre are probably more inclined to gravitate towards a professional practice that is concerned with change above reiteration. Indeed, hindsight allows us to see that the rise in 'fringe' companies in Britain owes as much to the upsurge in and availability of Drama as an academic programme of study as it does to the students' uprising in the Paris of 1968, an uprising which history has written as being of seminal influence. The majority of Drama graduates do not seek employment as professional practitioners: these paragraphs are not intended to argue a case for the employability or otherwise of Drama graduates *per se*. But former students on degree programmes (primarily Drama programmes) do form the mainstay of non-mainstream companies. Accurate figures are impossible to obtain. Companies come and go, sometimes lasting for the duration of only one short tour; personnel can change rapidly; and many company members are not also members of the actors' union, Equity. Only the evidence of one's own experience as it can be said to exist at all, offers such proof. Anybody who has regular social contact with non-mainstream companies will know that they are predominantly Drama graduates, and also that very few will have opted for an additional postgraduate year at an accredited Drama school.

Taking away the opportunity for non-Drama school students to engage in the practice of performance, which is recognised as commensurate with the practice of writing essays, is a doomed idea.<sup>20</sup> What it might gain in accountability, in that an essay is a tangible and permanent record which can be assessed according to recognised criteria, it must lose in terms of the faith those students might have otherwise gained in the potential of performance to speak for itself.

In addition to the internal differences between institutional and individual approaches within the Higher Education sector, all Drama lecturers are aware of the difficulties of having practical work credited as research-significant by colleagues from other departments. Senior management are traditionally cautious in terms of sanctioning an adequate hourage for production work, whilst the term 'publication' is still seen to refer to publications in print rather than performance.<sup>21</sup> The predominantly audience-friendly product of university 'drama societies' only adds to this difficulty. When unsupervised students are seen to mount a full-scale play entirely from their leisure time (and when that play is also 'successful' in terms of its feel-good popularity and box office receipts) then timetabled productions can appear esoteric, expensive and self-indulgent.<sup>22</sup>

Theatre professionals may harbour feelings of suspicion towards scholars, with their intellectualising of that which the profession regards as alchemical. 'Those who can, do; those who can't, teach' is an adage that continues to carry weight in our culture.<sup>23</sup> The vocabulary of academic critique is so markedly distinct from the vocabulary of the professionals' rehearsal room as to leave little room for constructive cross over. Where the vocabulary is antithetical, communication is



lost before it is able to take root. This is true despite the fact of once-marginal companies like *Theatre de Complicite* and *The National Theatre of Brent* becoming part of the fabric of mainstream performance. Notwithstanding these transformations, it is still the case that *thinking* or *talking* about theatre is held in less regard than *making* it, and making a *public* form to suit a *private* agenda is seen as an equally dubious endeavour.<sup>24</sup>

In this climate, one has to ask what the role of scholarship might be. Is it self-serving, inasmuch as it speaks of a desire on the part of academics to engage in practice without any of the pressures of commercial success which would ordinarily accompany production-work? Is it of long-term benefit in that its influences will come to fruition in future performances? If the study of theatre is regarded with distrust by the theatre profession itself, is the exercise fundamentally flawed? If theatre scholarship serves no more than the interests of the scholar (tenure, readerships, professorships etc.) is it automatically invalidated? It may be the case that much of that which appears as theatre scholarship is merely self-promotion in disguise. If I am to be honest about my work on and around *At Last Sight*, I have to recognise the fact that I have been driven as much by a desire to concentrate attention on a given project as to make that project worthy of the attention of others. This may mean that my sustained enthusiasm for the project has been misplaced. That my time would be more appropriately spent in the analysis of the performance of more weighty others, rather than labouring within the assumption that I am capable of creating a comparable theatre product of my own.<sup>25</sup>

To suggest this, however, is to deny my own status as both maker and scholar; as the creator of that which I am simultaneously holding up to the light of analysis and explanation. What does it mean to create? To write that I have created *At Last Sight*, albeit as one part of a team, is to imply that I have an answer to this question. This brings with it an attendant obligation.

Art is usually something made by an artist. The artist creates. The word 'create' stems from *creare*, meaning to generate or provide offspring. The word 'procreate' reminds us of this. The Spanish use the term *criatura* to refer to a child. The type of making employed by an artist is then the type we call creating. Art is made deliberately by artists. Artists can create art even when they have no real sense of what that art will be.<sup>26</sup> What follows is that the (prospective) artist needs to find the means through which an as yet unknown activity, event or object will find expression. When we say that an artist is creative, we are saying that s/he has produced something that is different from that which has gone before. Art is distinct from written analysis in this key regard. If I am offering a performance as research-in-practice, then the form of that performance will be likely to subvert expectations and extend conventions, whereas, by contrast, an essay, a thesis or a dissertation will probably conform to conventions. We link creativity to change, so that it is always in some way experimental.

The artist is always also a critic. Not necessarily in the way that I am offering critical information here on *At Last Sight*, but inasmuch as an artist inevitably functions in two simultaneous ways. S/he is the imaginative producer of art (in my case, the event of *At Last Sight*) and s/he is also a critic, observing the work as it



proceeds. In this way, the activity of self-criticism is always spectatorial. The artist's critical faculties are prompted by personal experience to the extent where it is difficult to envisage an artist creating, by choice, something which lies beyond the parameters of her or his own 'taste'. With *At Last Sight*, I have been working creatively in terms that related to a central theme, which was in turn favoured by my other identity, that of the critic. It has been apparent throughout this process that whatever I thought, as well as whatever performance decisions I made, have been constantly taken apart and reconfigured in the light of developing attitudes. There is an appropriateness to this. For just as I had set myself the challenge that *At Last Sight* should not misconstrue my personal mode of thinking (about theatre, about teaching, about my own life) then I have also been forcing upon myself an unusual alertness to precisely what it is that I think.

The published writings of theatre makers are often found to be contradictory, evasive and elliptical. Even for those of us whose making exists within an education framework, what we do and what we say often function at a tangent to one another. We have a concern with events, with moving bodies through time and space, which does not always dovetail comfortably with the theoretical notions we might discuss as part of our formal teaching. As researching practitioners, we have a duty to address these contradictions, which is why this thesis is written in the way that it is ... one that is similar to the logic that the work of *At Last Sight* embodied. There is a way in which the maker of work is also an onlooker, a beholder and reader of the work made. As such, the maker (the 'I' of the artist) suffers - and suffers no less than any member of the art event's audience - from the problem of defining just what it is that has been thought and made. A mixture of conjecture,

anecdote and metaphor are the likely companions of a working process which is concerned with the ambiguities of performance and the clarity of words written.

**8-10-99**

Recent exercises in the assessment of research within universities have been useful in many ways ... not least in that they have created in their wake discussion as to the primary object of research. The Higher Education Funding Council for England offers the following definition

‘Research’ for the purpose of the RAE is to be understood as original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. It includes ... the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances and artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights.<sup>27</sup>

The document goes on to define scholarship as “the creation, development and maintenance of the intellectual infrastructure of subjects and disciplines, in forms such as dictionaries, scholarly editions, catalogues and contributions to major research databases.”<sup>28</sup>

**10-10-99**

We can say then that, like other forms of research, research by means of performance has the aim of making a contribution to knowledge, and that this will usually be achieved by suggesting new perspectives on the known. Contributions to knowledge will rarely be manifest in expansive leaps of consciousness. Contributions to knowledge are complicated phenomena within the study of live performance. Research outcomes are open to challenge through the unreliability of evaluative processes as applied to performance. Where multi-interpretation is prioritised over a monologic ‘meaning’ this is doubly difficult. If a commonality



of understanding is being denied at source, then the utilisation of the tools of a standard scientific enquiry are simply not adequate. In fact, we may find the answer closer to home than we might imagine. The ways in which we can assess the 'findings' of research through performance are not dissimilar to the ways in which we can assess practical work submitted by our own students.

It is to these issues of assessment that this thesis now moves. In doing so, two purposes are served. In the first instance, I am able to offer a position on assessment as it applies to students who may be participating *for assessment* in the practical research projects of members of staff. And here the experiences of my own graduating students of last year, having been assessed for their work on *At Last Sight*, are uppermost in my mind. In the second instance, the suggestions can provide parallels between the ways in which we assess the work of students and the ways in which we wish our own research projects to be assessed.

**16-10-99**

There has been a long-standing difficulty in assessing the live product of students and the introduction of Drama and Theatre as academic disciplines has met with considerable resistance. This resistance has stemmed from a position which deals in universal standards of 'truth'; viewed from such a perspective, where findings are presented as quantitative results, outcomes (practical performances, workshop participation, this research) can never be fully or comfortably accepted. To respond to this with the writing up of generic criteria to cover a diverse range of practices (as has been attempted at University College Chester) is to engage in an unmanageable and misleading conflation.

Assessment procedures in the study of performance, as in other areas of the curriculum, must be capable of revealing progress ... or a lack of it. Procedures need to be capable of offering objective criteria for what counts as achievement. In performance terms, it is frequently the case that the criteria for achievement are implicit, rather than being formulated explicitly. For example, as a lecturer running a module in Devised Theatre, I need to have an implicit (although not exclusive) notion of what it is that counts as devising. Documentation which makes this implicit understanding explicit needs to do so with an awareness of the prejudices of one's own position. Many of us who teach Drama in the university sector are reluctant to make explicit the criteria on which we inevitably depend. We feel, perhaps, that to state an objective criterion is to generalise in a way that would inhibit our students' opportunities for individual creativity, or to tie us into one mode of practice at the expense of others. In practice, however, the fact that we are all engaged in assessment as a natural consequence of our professional lives means that we do need to be possessed of an ability to articulate a rationale for grades awarded. Certainly, when we are increasingly offering our own work for assessment as research, the obligation to couch a vocabulary of assessment in a way which provokes rather than prescribes is of paramount importance.

The following points can be made:

1: In order for an academic judgement to be regarded as 'objective' it does not also need to be 'true'. We are prepared to accept scientific judgements as objective even though there might be fundamental conflicts of opinion - or 'findings' - within the scientific community. We can go further than this and state that it is actually the indefinite possibility of differences and changes of opinion which gives objectivity



its status. What this means is that it is a feature of theory that it is, in principle, falsifiable, and *not* that it will be held as true for all time. Changes of perspective wrought by new research inevitably change the character of that which we are still able to term as an observation or outcome. Artists work within conceptual notions, and usually within one paradigm ... or at least one paradigm at a time; spectators and/or other 'readers' of the work will not necessarily be functioning within that same paradigmatic frame. The perceiver may regard the work in a different way to that which the creator intends. As professional assessors, we need to be able to recognise the conceptual framework within which the work is created and *offered*, and this requires sensitivity to a number of different approaches.

This is not about denying our prejudices so much as recognising and controlling them.

It says nothing whatsoever against the possibility of objective assessment of performance that there have been and still are changes of opinion and approach. Quite the opposite. We can see that such variety, alongside assessment criteria which embraces diversity is vital for the advance of practice as research. In work submitted there is an unlimited opportunity for individual differences of imaginative and creative approach. The assessment of this work has to be justified by reference to what is objectively there. To what the work is, rather than to what the specific assessors might prefer it to be. And this needs to be carried out with a recognition that advances come from new insights and conceptions. The fact that different types of work can emerge from the same stimulus is the nature of our subject. To assume that 'objectivity' means 'similarity' is to reduce creativity to the crass.

2: Facts rely on theories. A fact is only given any sense by an underlying conception, or theory. Facts may be objectively established, but this is inevitably done in the light of a particular theoretical approach. As theories are always open to modification, so are facts. The situation of no permanent absolutes does not mean that we cannot regard ephemeral theoretical positions as objectively arrived at phenomena. We can assess the articulation of a position (in whatever forms that articulation might take) without having any personal belief or investment in that position.

3: It is incorrect to assume that there can be no objectivity where judgement is based on interpretation. To believe this is to equate objective assessment with quantifiability. I can be objectively convinced that somebody is delighted, irate or in love without necessarily being able to reach such a conclusion by procedures of quantification. *All* judgement is interpretative as a matter of course and no quantification can exist without interpretation. Scientists interpret data in their field, just as we do in ours. Interpretation and judgement, not quantification, are the methods of assessment in performance-related subjects such as Theatre or Drama. What matters most to the creator is that this interpretation and judgement are informed.

4: The distinctive feature of performance is that feelings can be, and generally are, expressed *via* artistic means. That is to say that emotional content is a characteristic of performance. The presence of an emotional content does not imply that the work cannot be objectively assessed. Judgements about the



emotional resonance of a performance are just as open to rational justification by reference to objective criteria. The feelings expressed and evoked by a particular performance, *At Last Sight*, for example, are assessable by reference(s) to objective features of the work. There can be no workable separation of understanding and feeling, of knowledge and experience. In order to be able to *respond* to the work a spectator does not need to have understood it. In order to *judge* the work (academically) an assessor does. Performance involves a negotiation of emotionally complex structures: we need to be able to be carried along by the work, but not to the degree that we are not also able to recognise and respond critically to the arrangement and ordering of those structures. In short, we need to be both responsive and receptive,

What underlies our resistance to stating objective assessment criteria is a fear that it would stifle creativity. In fact, the opposite is true. That is to say that unless the student has a sense of what counts as achievement, there can be no notion of personal development. If there are no declared criteria, the notion of development becomes meaningless. Thus, it is the lack of objective criteria which is, in fact, restrictive. Nevertheless, it is frighteningly easy to impose narrow criteria on students' work to the exclusion of other equally valid possibilities. Again, I am able to cite our own criteria at University College Chester: criteria which uses an overtly objective terminology as a means of reducing students' opportunities to create. Assessment needs to provide room for difference, and this can only be achieved when the assessors are as open-minded as is possible.

In order to be capable of creating a performance which is appropriate at a particular level of submission, an ability to work through processes is required. This is a skill in itself. A technique. To concentrate on the acquisition of technical skills, however: juggling, stilt-walking, verse-speaking, tumbling etc. is to run the risk of applauding a display of technical competence, rather than the work of an artist who has something to say. Too rigid an emphasis on the learning of technical skills is likely to have the consequence of destroying creative potential; of imbuing skills with the status of an end-product rather than as choices which may or may not be taken in the pursuit of a given means. A performance should not be assessed according to its degree of success in the instantiation of skills, so much as to the ways in which such skills as are employed contribute to the effectiveness of the particular performance.

The skills we need to encourage, and I speak here of practice as research at all levels, are the skills of discrimination and discourse. *At Last Sight* was illustrative of discriminatory skills at a level appropriate to my own position. And the participating students' reflective essays reveal an impressive ability to discriminate, and also, by definition, an ability to express that discrimination through discourse.

**20-10-99**

Discriminatory skills open up a subtle and complex range of possibilities of performative expression and appraisal. Discourse skills consist of a means whereby discrimination is given voice. It consists of a knowing how to use the vocabulary of a particular art form. Learning the use of working vocabularies provides a means of communicating clearly with others about one's areas of interest. This is not about using language to obscure, to create a closed world where only the initiated



can enter, although that may well be a consequence. Facility in language, again, whether that language be the language of a performance, an essay, a *viva voce* or this thesis, is critical for the development and dissemination of conceptual repositionings.

Skills of discourse allow us to identify the research project to be undertaken and to locate that project within a broader field; to accumulate relevant information; to analyse the results of the project and to disseminate any conclusions. A willingness and ability to engage in and promote discourse is perhaps the most important distinction between academically driven practice and practice which might be regarded as existing for its own sake. Tracing the footprints that lead to the work is so central to the principle of performance study that it almost goes without saying that it is the scholar's greatest asset. It is also a process which involves an increased workload. Whereas the maker of work where the performed product is the sole outcome 'only' needs to be concerned with dissemination *via* performance, the researching practitioner's dissemination will almost always include an attendant written explanation.

**5-11-99**

There are many different ways of documenting performance. Noted examples come from Tim Etchells and also from Richard Schechner, particularly in his book *Performance Theory*.<sup>29</sup> Although Schechner's ideas have been in the public arena for some time, they have not directly influenced the approaches taken in this thesis. Etchell's documentation of his work with Forced Entertainment was published only as my own writing has been drawing to a close.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, mention needs to be made here of the ways in which these two practitioners have sought to

disseminate their performance work in book form. In the same way that the introduction to this thesis acknowledged the writing to come as indicative of only one process amongst many, so it is appropriate here to acknowledge something of that potential for diversity by referring briefly to examples that are easily available to the reader.

**8-11-99**

Tim Etchells discusses the work of Forced Entertainment in his 1999 publication *Certain Fragments*. It has been impossible for me to read this book without comparing Etchells' chosen format with my own. The format of *Certain Fragments* is as follows. A series of essays are intercut with anecdote and interviews. Diary notes overlap critical analysis and performance texts. Four performance texts are included, without any explanation as to why these are selected and the twelve remaining theatre pieces made prior to publication are excluded. Photographs are included without concern for chronology. These are photographs of performances and pacemaker scars, rehearsals and envelopes. The book is an exercise in ensemble writing and *assemblage*. This is writing with a genuine faith in the interconnectedness of a son's plastic ducks with the documentation of process. This is writing out of a fifteen year long dedication. This is writing with enigmatic headings ... with headings that read like the text-lists of the company's performances. This is writing that luxuriates in the knowledge that the practice it discusses is described on its cover as 'Britain's most brilliant'.

*Certain Fragments* is a timely publication. It articulates much of what makes Forced Entertainment's work as vital as it is, and in so doing it leaves many things out. The book reads as though it knows it exists to be critiqued rather than being a



critical study in itself. The gaps it leaves are filled in by the access the reader is given to the performance product, either live or recorded onto video tape. As a result of their extensive touring over a period of years it is safe to suggest that no higher education student in England is ever more than fifty miles away from at least one of their performances each year. This allows the luxury of space. That which is not written can still be seen.

By comparison with *Certain Fragments* my own thesis amounts to a more prosaic re-telling. Where Etchells weaves stories my thesis remains rooted to description and analysis. Where Tim Etchells has spent the last fifteen years talking and writing about his own work, I have spent the same period talking to students about the work of others ... often, in fact, about Etchells' own work. Etchells familiarity with the mechanics of his own processes is apparent on every page of *Certain Fragments*.

**10-12-99**

In *Performance Theory* Schechner's approach to documentation is given a scientific look. A series of graphs are utilised, which provide a diagrammatical support to the written words. Schechner writes specifically about his production of Sam Shepard's *Tooth of Crime*, which played at the Performing Garage, New York in 1973. In Schechner's twelve-page analysis one graph is used, alongside a scale drawing of the Performing Garage, two production photographs, a letter from Sam Shepard to Schechner and a boxed off plot summary.

Schechner writes about intention and realisation rather more than the process by which one aspect moves into the other. He discusses 're-scening' and describes

(after Grotowski) the spatial relationship between spectators and performers. Descriptions are offered as to which events take place in the 'public' side of the space, which are 'private' and which are in the 'centerpiece'. Schechner's overall description, in fact, displays a marked concern with performer/spectator relationships. This is made possible because Schechner's staging of *Tooth of Crime* allowed the spectators to move in and around the performance space. As a consequence of this, Schechner is able to write with authority about what the spectators *did*, whereas I, with *At Last Sight*, cannot write, other than with assumption, about what our spectators either *felt* or *thought*.

Notwithstanding this, Schechner's section on *Tooth of Crime* is not dissimilar to some of my own writing on *At Last Sight*. Where it differs most overtly is in Schechner's absence of a theoretically contextualising frame, and this is provided elsewhere in his book. Schechner's writing is less poetic than Etchells', and more firmly rooted in a searching for historical and socio-cultural connections. Etchells does rationalise Forced Entertainment's work, through references to The Wooster Group, Impact Theatre and Bobby Baker, for example, but the connections are offered as a shared exploration of contemporary concerns, rather than as the type of anthropological study undertaken by Schechner.

Readers of this thesis might also wish to consider Nicolas Whybrow's article 'In its Own Write', which appeared in *Performance Practice* Vol. IV and dealt innovatively with aspects of his performance work.<sup>31</sup>



11-12-99

Research through performance is at once similar to and distinct from other forms of experimental research. As in any approach, we can say that in instigating the research, any number of practices through which the investigation can develop are employed. Because practice as research - when that research involves an analysis of somebody else's practice - is not the material of this thesis, what it is that distinguishes research *via* performance is that the research is based upon the researcher's own location *within* the work to be studied. This involves and engages an essentially heuristic position. The position makes it vital for the researcher to be self-reflective and to move carefully through those areas where an objective terminology is offered as the articulation of subjective beliefs. When the distance between the researcher and the researched is dissolved to such a degree, the results are imbued, at best, with a unique and intimate perspective; at worst, those same results are so contaminated by the researcher's intention *in the act of making* that they disseminate little more than the researcher's own private agenda.

The dangers in assuming that one's own position should be regarded as universally applicable are clear to see. Notwithstanding the belief in objective criteria offered in previous paragraphs of this conclusion, we do need to proceed with caution. Objectivity is not a term which we can have any faith in if it is assigned on an almost *ad hoc* basis to each and every researcher's *nuance*. The findings of personally complicated research need to be analysed for what they are, according to the critical faculties of s/he who is analysing the work. Research through performance is providing scholars and practitioners with remarkable opportunities to have their voices heard and to extend the shelf-life of work which would

otherwise suffer the inevitable end of all ephemeral product; but this does not automatically mean that what we hear is important.

In searching for cures for cancer, scientists discover a formula for anti-depressants; in research towards anti-depression, scientists find a strategy for dealing with drug-dependency. The examples of scientists discovering something of value, which was patently not the thing they were looking for are legion. Performance research is no different. With *At Last Sight*, the findings do not create an accurate match up with the intentions. There are accidents. The group size shifts. People fall in love. Autobiography and a search for truth make way for group collaboration and presented lies. It is the nature of *all* performance research that the environment is never fully controlled. There is no sterility. There are no opportunities, ever, for repeating an experiment, simply because the human material of that experiment is never the same material twice. In this regard, we can say that performance is a generative process. Findings in practice as research threaten to fix as permanent what is in reality only ever a fleeting perspective on an equally fleeting event.

An engagement in practice as research necessitates a familiarity with the ways in which the project in question was organised. A heightened understanding of the importance of the researcher's own positionality is equally vital, alongside an acknowledgement of the limitations and privilege of that perspective. Researchers need to be able to have sufficient control over the vocabulary of their chosen field in order to articulate their findings to a reasonably informed third party, and also to be able to defend their research verbally.



**12-12-99**

There are a number of ways in which the individual researcher's position, intention and methods of demonstration can be stated. The following suggestions are in no way intended as an exclusive list and are offered here in no hierarchical ordering. They are posed, chiefly, as questions, which is not to say that they are designed as some sort of check list for practice as research. They are intended to function, primarily, as an encapsulation of my own experiences, which may prove useful to other researchers in the field of performance.<sup>32</sup> Different forms of research will carry with them their own unique emphases. Now - in hindsight - I am not even sure of the extent to which these questions were adequately addressed at the start of the joint processes of *At Last Sight* and this thesis. I can take some (small) solace in this from the knowledge that the researcher's own developing understanding is a central feature of research. Better by far to understand more at the close than the outset.

**28-12-99**

1: Where did the work take place? How did it differ from one space to another? How different were the rehearsal spaces to the performance space(s)? How are or were these spaces manipulated? What was the proximity of the spectators to the work? How determined and fixed were these distinctions? Did the project function within a space which was metaphoric or actual? What was the relationship of technical equipment to the project? At what point was any technical input incorporated into rehearsals?

2: If the above are examples of spatial location, what are the examples of a location which is social? Who was the work made by? For whom was it intended? What was its social purpose? What was the relationship between the aesthetic and the functional?

3: In what ways was the work made? How are specific elements of performance shaped and ordered? What are the relationships with the personnel involved in the project? To what extent is status an issue and how is it defined? How collaborative was the making process?

4: What is the *intention* behind the project, and to what extent is this intention manifest in any subsequent production? What is the relationship between the spectator and the to-be-seen? To what extent is any attempted closure invoked by the project?

5: What is the relationship of narrative to the work? How was any written text generated? Does the work have a single 'author'? Does the project exist as part of a recognisable *genre*? Is the work intended to be transferable, inasmuch as other companies might be invited (or expected) to revisit the material at some later stage?

6: What theoretical positionings informed the work as it was being made, and what theoretical positionings inform the written analysis? (Even when the maker and the analyst are one and the same person, these positionings may be different). In what ways can these different positions be regarded as compatible?



7: What are the backgrounds of the project-personnel? How does this work differ from their previous or usual practices? Is the project intrinsically investigative, or is it the researcher's subsequent (?) investigation which is seeking to make a contribution to knowledge?

8: To what extent are any performance elements within the project illustrative of action in and of itself, and, conversely, to what extent are these actions primarily representative of actions elsewhere? For example, are the on-stage actions intended to function as 'real'? To what extent does the performance relate to a world *beyond* itself?

9: What is the relationship between the researcher and the researched? Is the researcher 'inside' or 'outside' the work? Is the researcher also a participant? In what ways and to what extent has the researcher's role impacted on the project? In what ways has the project changed by dint of its being observed?

10: What stages of the work are being researched? Is the research focussing on one period, or on a number of periods? How are these research choices made?

11: What are the chief methods whereby performative communication is attempted and/or achieved through the project? What are the modalities of the performance? Why were they chosen? What was their effectiveness? And how can any such 'effectiveness' be measured?

12: How is the project itself being notated and/or recorded? How important is the visual evidence of the performance to the explanation? How are decisions as to notation arrived at?

13: What was the relationship of time to the project, and also of time to the research? At what times did rehearsals take place? When did the researcher write up any practice observed? What processes of reflection were allowed between the researcher's experience and the documentation? What was the extent to which possible reconsiderations of the researcher's position led to the revision and modification of previously written work? How did the researcher keep records of work seen? What were the ramifications of periods of rehearsal time on the performed project? Did the researcher attend every rehearsal? How was rehearsal time spent? Were any warm-up exercises used, and if so how were these seen to impact on both rehearsals and performance?

14: What was the relationship between those elements of the project which could be 'controlled' and those which could not be anticipated? Were there any 'random' instances, for example, which could be regarded as particularly significant, and in what ways was this 'significance' identified as such?

#### **4-1-00**

Research through one's own practice requires a concentration. A focusing of the attention in a specific way, so that one is as aware as possible of all of the implications and possible developments of a performance project. This runs parallel to an awareness that performance research (and in this it is no different to performance itself) has no givens. No absolutes. None other than the fact that



every maker of performance has something which is demanding of expression. Every maker of performance is of her or his time, and is so impelled to create within the spirit of that time. Exceptions to this can only result in a type of 'museum-art', and even this is marked more strongly by the age in which it was made than by any age it might be seeking to emulate.

We can see this in photographic evidence of re-staged historical plays, where even in the frozen moment, the physical *attitudes* of the performers (not to mention hair styles) will give us a close approximation of the decade at least in which the work was re-staged. Notions of reality do not stay fixed. Images of psychic chicanery from the turn of the century read to us now as so obviously fake and staged as to be laughable, and yet we know that they were, *at the time*, regarded by many as being 'real' manifestations of the recently dead. Faked paintings, indiscernible from the original at the time of their appearance at auction houses, emerge, over time, as obvious copies, as though time is exposing the space between versions. We make art of our own time then, even when we are actively intent on recreating the past, and this is one of the identifying features of creativity.

The word 'conclusion' seems not quite appropriate for the words of this chapter. It is as though I am seeking to bring the thesis to a point of arrival, when in fact that point feels much more strongly like departure ... an opening up of possibilities. A braver writer than I would grasp the nettle here and abandon the term completely.

Just as *At Last Sight* was concerned with a resistance to closure, so its documentation is equally disinclined to state its case. As though to do so would

stand as a betrayal to interpretative license. Issues of essentialism, of ownership, of frames of performance, of process and articulation, of borrowing and bending theoretical positionings at will and by default have been constant in each and every aspect of the work ... whether I was always aware of it or not. It is only now, with a pause at the very dawn of the new century, that I am able to gain perspective on the breathlessness of the thesis. A chain of doing, writing, talking, writing, doing that has taken this project from the relative clarity of first intentions to the confusion (a much more appropriate chapter heading than 'Conclusion') at its end.

What is most important is not what I have learned or think I know so much as what it is that the reader takes away. This is neither apology nor evasion. It is the premise on which the project was started and it remains that premise now as that same project draws to a close.

These words mean that I am faced with feelings similar to those at the end of rehearsals for *At Last Sight*. When adjustments cease, the maker is effectively saying that the work is ready. It is now to be given away. It becomes the property of the reader, and the safety of the desk - like the safety of the rehearsal room - is sacrificed to public perusal. This is not about fear. It is not about the fear of response, of criticism, of disapproval. It has much more, I think, to do with the pleasure of making ... and this has really been the thrust of everything connected with this thesis. The pleasure of making. And, as with *At Last Sight*, that which has been made has been constructed in the knowledge that it would inevitably pass from my hands into the hands of others.



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<sup>1</sup> Freeman, J. 'The Location and Theory of Looking'. *Journal of Dramatic Theory & Criticism* Vol. XII, No. 2, Spring, 1998 pp. 129-141

<sup>2</sup> In many ways the *assemblage* of which I speak is part of a recognisable shift within performance work as part of undergraduate study, albeit not at every institution. University departments carve their own agendas and new members of staff and students bring new ideas. The journal *Studies in Theatre Production*, available through SCUDD, provides examples of the types of work engaged in at a number of institutions. The practical work undertaken at places such as Liverpool John Moores University and Bretton Hall, with their emphasis on theatre as a story interestingly told, is different in kind as well as intent to work at Manchester Metropolitan University and Nottingham Trent University, where dramatised narrative is less likely to be a focus for students' engagement.

<sup>3</sup> See Berger, J *Ways of Seeing*. BBC/Penguin Books, London, 1977.

<sup>4</sup> Eugenio Barba discusses the organic transference of performance techniques and traditions in *The Paper Canoe*, (Barba) Routledge, London and New York, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> See Schechner, R; *Between Theater and Anthropology*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1985; *Performance Theory*, Routledge, 1988; and Schechner and Appel *By Means of Performance*, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Edgar, A and Sedgwick, P. *Keynotes in Cultural Theory*. Routledge, London and New York, 1999. p.2.

<sup>7</sup> Phelan, P. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. Routledge, London and New York, 1993. pp.148 -9.

<sup>8</sup> Willet, J. *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*. Methuen, London, 1959 and Esslin, M. *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*. Heinemann, London, 1959 are standard academic texts on the work of Brecht.

<sup>9</sup> My 'evidence' here is based on fifteen years of lecturing, with experience at a number of institutions, both in further and higher education, with considerable experience of seeing student work at festivals and from discussions with colleagues and students.

<sup>10</sup> There are many published and available works which describe the development of modernism in theatre.

<sup>11</sup> The Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, U.S.A provides a 'theme park' approach to the acts of genocide perpetrated in the Second World War. Visitors are allocated identity cards, which approximate as closely as possible to 'real life' victims of the Holocaust. Some victims lived and some died. The museum visitor inserts the card into various terminals located at computer stations along the museum's route and is provided with updates of their 'character's' progress. Video footage plays as part of the 'experience'.

<sup>12</sup> Drain, R. (Ed) *Twentieth Century Theatre: A Sourcebook*. Routledge, London and New York, 1995.

p. xv

<sup>13</sup> Foreman, R *Art + Performance: Richard Foreman* Gerald Rabkin (Ed). The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1999. p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Edwards, B. *QAA + PhD*. Electronic correspondence to SCUDD Mailbase. 14th April 1999.

<sup>15</sup> When Kenneth Rea writes that 'The standard of acting in university or polytechnic productions is likely to be lower than that of the average drama school.' (Rea, K. *A Better Direction*. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, London, 1989. p. 111 he is arguing from a mainstream perspective that seeks to reinforce rather than challenge the status quo.

<sup>16</sup> My evidence here is anecdotal, but consistent.

<sup>17</sup> 'While the older director tends to be Oxbridge, male and ex-public school, among the younger generation there is a higher presence of women directors, less Oxbridge dominance, but a greater degree of university education. Thus, eight out of ten directors under thirty are graduates.' (Rea, 1989. p. 24.) '39% of theatre directors have come from independent schools, which is extremely high, considering that the overall national figure for independent school education is only 7%.' p.

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<sup>18</sup> See Mathur, P. 'Method and Madness' in *Blitz*, October 1988, No. 70. pp. 44-50

<sup>19</sup> Again, the evidence for this is anecdotal, and also of one's own eyes. Small and middle scale touring theatre companies, dealing with non-mainstream practice, feature fewer drama school



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graduates than graduates of arts-related disciplines at universities. Talking with company members reveals this to be the case, as does following the careers of former students. Not all of the companies in question are members of the ITC (Independent Theatre Council), issuing Equity contracts to employees, and the itinerant nature of the work makes data unreliable. In this instance, the best evidence is of experience.

<sup>20</sup> '(University) Drama departments often encourage their students to create their own opportunities, and indeed this has given rise to theatre groups that have stayed together on a professional basis.' (Rae, 1989. p.114)

<sup>21</sup> The document *RAE 2001*

published on the internet at <http://www.hiss.ac.uk/education/hefc/rae/2001/2.html>

<sup>22</sup> Drama Society productions at University College Chester during recent years have included *Bugsy Malone*, *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, *Grease*, *The Rocky Horror Show* and *Guys and Dolls*. Each of these productions sold out on all of the performance nights, and members of senior management (principal, deputy principal or dean) saw each one. The local press covers Drama Society productions, running photographs and articles prior to the opening nights. There is a feeling amongst colleagues and students who are outside the Drama Department that these productions are generally more satisfying than our own internal productions. This is perhaps to be expected, in that productions *as research* tend, almost by definition, to subvert expectation and to stretch theatre conventions. For those members of an audience who are not primarily interested in experimentation through performance, these productions are likely to alienate rather than engage. Some colleagues make no distinction between Drama Society and Drama Department productions, believing that musicals are part and parcel of our undergraduate programme of study.

It is a fact that Drama Society productions pull in an audience of non-drama specialists; a fact which adds to their attraction in some eyes. Whereas Drama Department work is largely seen by Drama students and staff, Drama Society productions attract spectators from every academic department, as well as members of the general public. The profile of Drama Society work then can be seen as higher than that of the Drama Department.

<sup>23</sup> This is in many ways a British phenomenon. Teaching performance skills, as part of a traditional student/teacher relationship, is highly respected in many parts of the world: in mainland Europe, in Asia and also in America, where actors such as Al Pacino regard time spent teaching at the Actors' Studio in New York as valuable.

<sup>24</sup> Under the heading 'Quality Control', Rea (1989) draws on the opinions of two people, Les Blair and Peter Gill. Blair is credited with 'Who is going to teach these courses? Please don't let it be the academics' (p.100), whilst Gill says 'I don't think (university) drama departments, as they are organized at present, are of any use because they reflect the prejudices rather than the enthusiasms of the teachers' (p.101). No contradictory views are offered in this section.

<sup>25</sup> In some ways, the early decision to concentrate attention on my own practice was based on a pragmatic approach. As a full-time lecturer with a relatively heavy teaching load, my commitments at Chester would make it difficult to spend enough time with a professional company to make an accurate assessment of their making processes. This, combined with the fact that I am obliged to make at least one piece of work each year with undergraduates, had some bearing on my decision.

This is not to suggest that the chief reason was not to observe the creative process from both inside and out, so much as it is a recognition that some aspects of decision-making are driven less philosophically than others.

<sup>26</sup> Henry Miller writes 'I know nothing in advance ... I have faith in the man who is writing' (in Ghiselin, 1952. p. 180). Miller's views are consistent with many artists working across a range of fields. It is interesting to note that even when the artist *does* know how the artwork is likely to proceed (as was the case with Francis Bacon, if Joule is to be believed) the idea of instinctive progression is adopted as an aid to even greater artistic credibility.

<sup>27</sup> *Research Assessment Exercise in 2001 (RAE 2001)*. Published on the Internet at

. p.4

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*



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<sup>29</sup> Schechner, S. *Performance Theory*. Routledge, London and New York, 1988.

<sup>30</sup> Etchells, T. *Certain Fragments*. Routledge, London and New York, 1999.

<sup>31</sup> Whybrow, N in *Performance Practice* Vol. IV, 1998. pp. 9-21.

<sup>32</sup> The practice as research schema offered here is a development of the approach Fred McVittie used in his case study of *The Bureau of Internal Affairs*. For McVittie's analysis see 'A Case Study into Practice as Research'. *Performance Practice*. Vol. 3, 1997. pp. 19-25.

## Postscript

8-8-2000

‘Every practical procedure ... presupposes a theoretical perspective of some kind’.<sup>1</sup>

With the practice of performance, theories - some of the theories of postmodernism, for example - are part of the conceptual apparatus of making work. This is not the same thing as saying that theories provide fixed referents. In the context of the documentation undertaken, and also with the performance that was *At Last Sight*, the theoretical perspectives ranged from multifaceted interpretations of the maker/writer’s own intentions to methods that offered apparently coherent narratives of empirical evidence. In this way, something of the spirit of selective eclecticism that fuelled the process of creating *At Last Sight* also informed the methodology of documentation.

Whilst the approach to making *At Last Sight* was consistently made subject to theorisation, the theorisation was not always consistent. A number of positionings were adopted and discarded at will. The processes of making and of making-reading were synonymous with ‘the human condition of trying to construct a viable and meaningful existence’ when those meanings were being undermined by their own internal contradictions, and this demanded a relationship with theory.<sup>2</sup> What art-theory is about, according to Lyotard, is encapsulated in the question: ‘Why does something happen rather than nothing?’<sup>3</sup> It is for this reason that the approaches to theory in this thesis were used in the ways that they were: as evidence of what happened rather than of nothing happening at all, and of why things happened in the ways that they did.



When Susan Melrose argues for a reappraisal of ‘theory’ within performance, she remarks that ‘theory may, indeed, be counter-productive in the context of effective performance-making.’<sup>4</sup> My conclusion based on research with *At Last Sight* lead to both a reiteration and a rebuttal of these claims. Theory is not *something other*, *something applied*, either before or after the event of performance. What we think is what we do, and the investigation has been a charting of this process of thought as deed and deed as thought.

The writing of this thesis has been an experimental action, the outcome of which could not have been foreseen as the work was commenced. (In Jeanette Winterson’s 1991 preface to *Oranges are not the only fruit* she asks the question ‘Is *Oranges* an autobiographical novel?’ Her answer of ‘No not at all and yes of course’ is equally true of this thesis.<sup>5</sup>) The thesis acquired its own determination, within which the writer’s intentions were only one factor among many. Of equal significance to the reader may have been those elements that remained (and remain) unknown to the writer. In this way the reader has been more capable of determining the meaning of the thesis than have I. We should, however, remember Zygmunt Bauman’s assertion that the reader ‘understands as much as his knowledge allows him.... If the author sends his signals from an island whose interior he has not and could not explore in full, the reader is a passenger who walks the deck of a sailing ship he does not navigate. The meaning is the instant of their encounter.’<sup>6</sup>

The thesis has been concerned with fieldwork. Fieldwork varies, as a practice, according to the degree in which the observer controls the situation s/he is investigating and the extent to which s/he participates in that situation and interacts

with the subjects under investigation. Because the field-work in question was a construction and rehearsal process carried out with undergraduates in the final year of their degree programme, my participation and interaction, as tutor, director and observer was both complex and full. The ways in which the relationship between observer and observed developed over the period of a full academic year formed a narrative that went undetected during the period of writing, but which has emerged, in subsequent readings, as a central feature.

There is a distinction between the 'I' of the knower and the 'Me' of the known, and we can say that the self contained in the thesis has consisted of both parts. Similarly, this thesis has a preoccupation with ideas of 'truth' at the same time as it deals in lies (that this is a curious admission with which to conclude a contract between the reader and the read is not in doubt). This amounts to an invidious-seeming essentialism. Whilst much of the *language* of the thesis deals in uncertainties much of the addressed reveals a search for something 'true', so that my public self is embracing postmodern terminology at the same time as my inner self is seeking (and not always consciously) to imbue feelings with authority. If there is any evidence of catharsis in either the thesis or *At Last Sight*, at least for the maker, then that catharsis is achieved in the pursuit of something 'true'. Why this truth has been sought at all in art, rather than elsewhere, where one might argue that it matters more, is dealt with in the body of the work.

If we accept that the certainty of 'truth' is lost to us, which is a *theory* rather than a *fact*, then it becomes difficult to see any space beyond this for theory to occupy. Interpretation *per se* relies upon arriving at a distinction between what is offered as



the surface of a text and what is thought to exist beneath it ... interpretation is in this sense the making of a distinction between surface and depth. If all that we are able to say is that something *happened*, or did not (to take Baudrillard's assertions that the Gulf War never really took place) then there is little left for theory to do.<sup>7</sup> If the degree zero of postmodernism is left unchallenged, if truth is to remain as a disenfranchised concept, then the idea of academic honesty is equally bankrupt, for we cannot believe in one type of 'honesty' in a world where no truth can be said to exist.

This contradiction is a part of making performance. The printed word has a permanence (and a status) that is denied to the ephemerality of performance. However, the existence of live performance in the *now* imbues it with a different relationship with truth. The work seen may be illusory, but the *seeing of it*, in this space and at this time, is rarely, if ever, in doubt. Readers of words written are not usually witnesses to the process of writing. Words, no matter how truthfully they may read, are constructed in the elsewhere, whereas performances, no matter how other they may seem, are constructed in the here and now. Where, on the surface, this thesis has charted a wrestling with the contradictions between truth and lies that contradiction has been between performance and print.

Whatever it was that I was working through *at the time of making*, I was also always aware of myself as a thinker. In this way the existence of the 'I' that was aware created a duality: partly known and partly knower, partly observed and partly observer. We can relate this to Zupancic's statement that

The fact that somebody else views me as an object of his outer intuition does not yet permit me to draw any conclusions about my identity. Such an inference would be possible only if I were able to put *myself* in the very place from which I am being observed, if *I* were able to view myself *at the same time* as object of inner and outer intuition – if *I* were able to *see myself the way the other sees me*.<sup>8</sup>

This thesis has shown that the act of making performance, no less than the documenting of one's own creative processes, demanded the inner and outer intuition that Zupancic comments deny.

Notwithstanding the temptation to make post-performance adjustments to the thesis, it has remained a narrative written in its own present. Because the present *is* live performance this method of documentation has been consistent in kind with its subject. As performances shift, fold in on themselves, find new forms and strategies, so the processes of documentation need to develop and keep pace. The documentation that has been this thesis is a contribution to development.

Identifying the methodological approaches appropriate to an area of investigation is a major element of the process of research. The documentation of performance has not yet developed a singular defining methodology, and different writers will document in different ways. A distinction between research and documentation *per se*, however, between scholarship and *reportage*, is that in research the methodologies need to be identified and articulated. This distinction continues inasmuch as researchers need also to separate methodology from method. For the purposes of this paper, I am taking 'methodology' to refer to the theoretical framework which informs analysis and 'method' to refer to the procedure(s) of gathering information for the study. In this way, method is the 'how' of the research and methodology the 'why'. Richard



Beardsworth urges caution, however, in terms of a too-readily arrived at acceptance of 'method'. He notes that Derrida is careful to avoid the term

because it carries connotations of a procedural form of judgement. A thinker with a method has already decided *how* to proceed, is unable to give him or herself up to the matter of thought in hand, is a functionary of the criteria which structure his or her conceptual gestures.<sup>9</sup>

Notwithstanding Beardsworth's reminder of Derrida's *caveat*, we can say that the method is the 'how' of the research and methodology the 'why'.

The process of making *At Last Sight* has been charted in a way which is identifiable as a method, and yet that same method has been approached in a way that seeks to resist the type of closure that Beardsworth identifies as Derrida's fear.

Whilst the thesis has adhered to its own particular method, what is of equal significance are the methodologies that the writing has revealed. This creates an open relationship between words written and words read, inasmuch as 'methodology' is something the reader, no less than the writer, will bring to the page.

A weakness with much documentation of performance is that it tends to concentrate on the phenomenon of performance rather than what it was that led to the work being produced. This *leading up* is vital to our understanding of how performances are made. Without it we are left with the idea of performance as something magical, as alchemy. The documentation entered into here is as closely concerned with the processes leading up to performances as to descriptions of that work as 'finished product'. Pavis warns us that 'No performance description is ever without subjective elements that influence the fundamental understanding of the work'.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly,



this documentation is subjective and partial. It would be futile to pursue an objective and complete documentation, since on the one hand every decision to include is also a loss, and on the other the activity of observing brings with it its own impositions. The issue of documentation has two elements: *what* to document and *how* to carry out the documentation. These elements are choices, and choice cannot be separated from subjectivity. I chose to write about *this* material, at *this* time and in *this* way.<sup>11</sup> What marks this thesis apart from much that has gone before is that the writers' subjectivity is rarely concealed behind a screen of objective terminology. The subjectivity is open and discussed. The reader, like the writer, has to remember that the documents encountered here were created out of particular approaches. The writing does not articulate what it *was* so much as *how* it was seen and how I *choose* to make that seeing seen.

Whilst the performance text of *At Last Sight* does not exist, the dramatic text remains. It is offered here as a partial illustration of the work. One piece of a jigsaw. Were I to concentrate more fully on *At Last Sight* as an example of theatre performance I would be imposing my own reading on that which was made to be given away. *At Last Sight* as a performance text belonged to particular times, places and people. Performers, director, crew and spectators remember it happening, and each of these memories determines what it was that took place. My documentation of the processes leading to *At Last Sight*, and also out of it, is my own. Any one of the performers would write differently about different stages, but this partiality, like all others, is unavoidable. To offer something under the guise of a 'full account' would necessitate the impossibility of everybody involved writing about everything that happened before, during and after we met ... and in what font? The partiality of process, however, is less severe



than with product. The product was created to be interpreted by hundreds of strangers. The process was for nine performers and myself.

That said, this documentation is not a surrogate for performance. Neither is it a surrogate for process. The documentation *is* the documentation. It is from the selectivity of the process that its reliability and scholarly relevance comes. It identifies documentary as fiction; albeit a fiction that seeks to seduce its readers into belief.

Theories are not self-contained. They bleed into each other. This does not mean that we cannot apply a particular analytical framework to any type of performance event. This is not about transforming research into calcification. That the adoption of a mode of analysis enables the researcher to utilise certain investigative procedures does not mean that the investigation-outcome is either assumed or predetermined.

The researcher's intervention has been made manifest in the personal pronoun. This is an acknowledgement that the 'I' has an overt function. We need to remember Barthes' warning, however, that the 'I which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or more precisely, lost.'<sup>12</sup> This applies to the researcher's 'I' no less than to the 'I' of a subsequent reader. The sense we send is the sense we make. This sense is flawed and incomplete, but only inasmuch as it is born of partiality. Scholarship will always reveal more about the student than the studied. Approached thus, the choices we make as to what we omit are as significant as the ways that we deal with what remains, and partiality is accepted as an act of revelation. When Geraldine Harris writes of Rose English's *The Double Wedding* (1991) she explains that 'the theoretical terrain in which this piece appears to be placed, in and of

itself, suggests that in the final analysis this is a show which cannot be interpreted, only described.<sup>13</sup> This is a negation of the fact that all description is interpretative. What it is that Harris chooses to describe is the result of an interpretative act, not *vice versa*. To suggest otherwise is to argue for a type of factual reporting that we know is impossible, and, ultimately, undesirable. What makes Harris' reading of English as interesting as it is is the perspective she brings. The place that we view from is as central to our findings as the subject on which we fix our gaze.

As a piece of dramatic text *At Last Sight* is relatively 'wordy'.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, its words are often descriptive. The words stand thus as both substitutes and prompts for physical activity. This is text as verbal deictic reference.<sup>15</sup> Because *At Last Sight* conveys a number of messages about actions, which subsequently do or do not take place, we can say that verbal deixis is its dominant code, both as a written and performance text.

The text was written for narration as much as for any conventional notions of representative acting. The ways in which the narrators describe events will affect the spectator's understanding of the narrators' motives, which will have some bearing on the 'trust' felt and the level of 'truth' attributed to that which is narrated. If the spectator trusts the narrators then s/he will be inclined to believe the descriptions presented, even (or especially) when the narrator is both speaker and doer. With the role of narrator in *At Last Sight* these aspects of 'trust' are subject to a continuous shift. As a link between the overt fiction of performance and the assumed fact of an outside world, the narrators' function is problematised by their own failure to locate themselves for any length of time within one world or the other. This signals a



deliberate collapsing of confidence in the distinction. Inside and outside performance is no greater a distinction than inside and outside any place at all. Conventions may be different, but that does not mean that one place is 'real' and the other 'false'. The performance of *At Last Sight* is as much a part of the 'real world' as a trip to a supermarket or an hour spent in a library.

Essentialism is often associated with biological determinism, with the attribution of particular traits as being unchangingly human. In this way, essentialism could be regarded as a denial of cultural shifts in the ways that different people function. Approached from this perspective it is difficult to regard essentialism as anything other than *naïve*. We know that differences in gender, race, health, wealth, education and class, for example, have ramifications on the ways in which we live. However, this is not the way I am using essentialism here. For the purposes of this thesis, essentialism has been used to refer to certain phenomena, which, whilst they might be no more than cultural impositions, are so deep-rooted as to be *regarded* as essential to the way we live our lives. I include in this our need to distinguish between 'truth' and 'fiction' ... a distinction that is critically impossible to uphold. Nevertheless, in the way we function as people we make constant decisions as to the truth-status of events. As a father, I believe in the love of and for my children as something unchangeably 'real', even in the same moments that I read, write or talk about truth as a Nietzschean illusion.

In performance terms, we do not always know whether a particular work makes any claim for truth. In these circumstances it is difficult, and perhaps even inappropriate, to arrive at a judgement as to 'truthfulness'. Because performance *per se* has the

complex relationship with 'truth' that it has, any assessment has to be arrived at through consideration of context. In certain contexts, for example, actions or words might be regarded as ironic ... in other contexts the same phenomena might be regarded as truthful.<sup>16</sup> In its broadest sense, contextualisation is provided through features of the work that are suggestive of intent. Certain forms of address claim to deal in truth, and their reliability can be measured against this intention. These forms can be assessed according to their self-imposed terms. A news report, for example, sells itself as a truthful reading. So does a scientific report or a thesis. The writings that make up this thesis are expected to function as 'truthful statements'. Similarly, programme notes to a performance would be expected to conform to our cultural expectations of reliability.

Any work that makes a claim for truthfulness is compromised at source by the inevitability of its mediation. The truth in performance, no less than in performance writing, cannot be regarded as either absent or present ... the differences between production and reception make any such claim redundant. We might argue that the here-and-nowness of performance makes it more 'truthful' than the there-and-thenness of writing; however, performance is no less subject to mediation than is written text. Any apparent immediacy is illusory. The moment is loaded, and only partly by the performance maker. To say that activities take place in the same context in which they are read is to disregard the fact that the frame around performance is always also a contextualising framework within the spectator.

This takes us some way towards an understanding of truth's adulterated transference - as an omnipresent act of spectatorial deconstruction - it also throws into doubt the



possibility of truth having any currency for the performer. If truth has no possibility of 'successful transmission', then its value as currency is reduced; equally, we have to question the extent to which a performance maker has an adequate understanding of how and why performative choices have been made. What we think is the truth may not be so. This thesis has operated within a fluid arena, a place of shifting relationships between investigations and omissions, between claims for truth and untruthful claims. The doubly-autobiographical nature of *At Last Sight* and this thesis has resulted in a number of truth-claims, many of which have been created with as honest an intent as has been possible. It has been possible for the reader of this thesis to identify me as the writer, in a way that makes the authorial 'I' my own. It has not been as possible for the spectator of *At Last Sight* to make those same assumptions.

The performance project was instigated out of an interest in confessional art, and yet it is the thesis that has developed into a confession, at the same time as it became increasingly apparent that *At Last Sight* had little or nothing confessional to say. *At Last Sight* was an identifiably autobiographical work, even within the context of *all* work being autobiographical, but it was not confessional.<sup>17</sup> I am drawing on Derrida here in his distinction between autobiography and confession. For Derrida confession is connected to the idea that truth is concealed until its moment of confessional articulation.<sup>18</sup> Confession denies the possibility of anything other than a truth-claim: its whole *raison d'être* is a claim for truth. This has been the case with the thesis, but not the performance. Part of this is to do with authorship ... the words written are mine, the sentence and paragraph lengths are chosen by me; even the choice of font is mine. As J. M. Coetzee says of his own work



This is a question about telling the truth rather than a question about autobiography. Because in a larger sense all writing is autobiography: everything that you write, including criticism and fiction, writes you as you write it.<sup>19</sup>

While the words I choose remain my own - at least prior to the act of being read - the performance of *At Last Sight* was mediated, long before it reached a public audience, by the concerns, attitudes and individual nuances of the performers. Like Derrida, Coetzee tells us that confessional writing is identified “on the basis of an underlying motive to tell an essential truth about the self.”<sup>20</sup> The writing of this thesis has been governed by a need to write what it is that I do not yet know, and to do so as part of the same activity of writing as a claim for truth. The essential truth of the thesis is also then the essential truth of my self. That which the thesis has confessed has been my own need to confess. The confession has made the thesis a witness to my own witnessing of the process of making *At Last Sight*, and this act of witness could only be achieved *via* the setting down and the giving away. The documentation of *At Last Sight* has not amounted to a truthful documentation so much as to an act of confession. The publication of the document is necessary then in more ways than the obvious one of disseminating the findings of a particular experience. It is necessary because confession cannot be separated from language and because language can be defined as an attempt to shape an experience into a comprehensible form.

Derrida has it that a “true act of giving (only) ever occurs ... without any consciousness of the possible response of the other.”<sup>21</sup> I can make no similar claims for this thesis, and yet it remains an act (a ‘true act’?) of giving. That which began as the documentation of a process has developed into the documentation of a methodology of documentation. Immersed in all of this, in every page, every line and



every word, has been the documentation of the self who documents. Rather than pulling the focus away from an analysis of performance making this has resulted in a deepening belief that who we are is what we make. Making a deliberate choice to write ourselves into the ways we write about the work we see is not 'more honest' than choosing otherwise, but at least the dishonesties are borrowed less freely from others.

This thesis makes no claims for documentary truth. It provides no more than a fleeting glimpse of the ways in which a performance was made, and the ways in which that making has been subsequently described. Its value lies not so much in any idea of objective authority as in its recognition of bias.

If this form of documentation reveals as much about the student as the studied, then this is a consequence rather than a denial of the autobiography of spectatorship. The seeing self is not distinct from the self who then makes seen. Such could never occur. This thesis is a record of a particular process of seeing and of making seen: a work created through a claim for truth that draws to a close with a disclaimer.

“There is no such thing as an objective, innocent, primary document. The document ... is the result, above all, of an assemblage, whether conscious or unconscious, of the history, the time and the society which have produced it, and also of the ensuing periods through which it has continued to be used, even if perhaps in silence.... The document is a monument.... In the end, there is no documentary truth. Every document is a lie.<sup>22</sup>

As it was with the act of *At Last Sight*, so it is with the words that have sought to discuss it. They end not with closure or emphasis, so much as with a fading away ... a running out of space.



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- <sup>1</sup> Barry, P, 1995. p. 35
- <sup>2</sup> Smith, D Zygmunt Bauman, *Prophet of Postmodernity*. Polity Press, Cambridge, 1999. pp. 137-138
- <sup>3</sup> Blistene, B "A Conversation with Jean-Francois Lyotard," *Flash Art: Two Decades of History, XX/ Years*, pp. 129-130
- <sup>4</sup> Melrose, S. 'Restaging' Theory' in the Postgraduate Performance Studies Workshop' in *New Theatre Quarterly* Volume XV Part 1 (NTQ 57) February 1999. pp. 39- 44
- <sup>5</sup> Winterson, J *Oranges are not the only fruit*. 1991
- <sup>6</sup> Bauman, Z *Hermeneutics and Social Science: approaches to understanding*. Hutchinson, London, 1978 p. 229`
- <sup>7</sup> For an elaboration of Baudrillard's thoughts, see Norris, C *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals and The Gulf War*. Lawrence & Wishart, 1992.
- <sup>8</sup> Zupancic, A. *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*. Verso, London & New York, 2000. p. 70
- <sup>9</sup> Beardsworth, R. *Derrida and the Political*. Routledge, London, 1996. p.4
- <sup>10</sup> Pavis, P. 'Notes Toward a Semiotic Analysis' in *The Drama Review*. Vol. 23, No. 4 (T84), December 1979. p. 95
- <sup>11</sup> This was recognised as forming a central aspect of the research as early as 1997. The importance of choices was articulated on the first page of the introduction.
- <sup>12</sup> Barthes, R. *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller, Hill & Wang, New York, 1974. p. 10
- <sup>13</sup> Harris, G. *Staging Femininities*. Manchester University Press 1999. p. 23
- <sup>14</sup> By 'wordy' I refer to the fact not only that *At Last Sight* contains upwards of 10,000 words for speaking, but that the work began as a written text. Had I started the rehearsal process with no written words it is likely that *At Last Sight* would have developed with a different and more pronounced physical vocabulary.
- <sup>15</sup> Matejka, L & I. Titunik. 'The Hierarchy of Dramatic Devices' in *Semiotic Art*. Vintage Books, New York, 1983. p37
- <sup>16</sup> A phenomenologist would argue here that this sentence is unsupportable, inasmuch as a different context denies the possibility of 'the same phenomena' taking place. Indeed, no performative phenomena could ever exist within the same, repeated context, precisely because contexts shift no less than anything else. What happens at one moment can be repeated, but never absolutely and never to the same effect.
- <sup>17</sup> It is interesting to note that I referred to idea of confession as something 'ominous' in January 1998 (ref. p.44). The shift in attitude between then and now is pronounced.
- <sup>18</sup> Derrida, J. *Acts of Literature*. Derek Attridge (ed.) Routledge, London & New York, 1992, p.34
- <sup>19</sup> Coetzee, J.M *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*. David Attwell (ed.) Harvard University Press, Cambridge, USA, 1992. p.17
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid* p.252
- <sup>21</sup> Derrida, J *Given Time*. Peggy Kamuf (trans.) University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991. p.11
- <sup>22</sup> De Marinis, Marco. 'A Faithful Betrayal of Performance: Notes on the Use of Video in Theatre' in *New Theatre Quarterly*. Vol. 1 No. 4, November 1985. p. 383



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## **Appendices**

The pagination for appendices is located at the bottom right hand side of each page.

Any alternative pagination forms part of the original document.



# Appendix One

This is a blueprint for the practical project of *At Last Sight*, rather than the written element. The written element is the investigation of a methodology of documentation.

**Name of Researcher:** John Freeman

**Name of Project:** At Last Sight

**Type of Project:**

Scripted, devised and directed performance. *At Last Sight* will be cast with Level 3 students from University College Chester, as part of a triple module in production work.

**Status of project with regard to the overall research process:**

Practical investigation, which will form the basis of a written thesis. The writing in the thesis will be commenced at the same time as the practical element (the creation of a performance text for *At Last Sight*) is undertaken. The performance project will not form part of the overall submission for assessment.

**Aspect of project under investigation:**

The development of a form of performance which will allow the participating students a high degree of autonomy, within a structure which is initiated and controlled by a writer/director. Notions of truth will be explored *via* a scripted content which is autobiographical, alongside various concerns and situations within the group. The relationship between the academic honesty and the masquerade of performance will be a concern of the research.

**General aims of the project:**

The project is thematically concerned with investigating the currency of truth within art. Issues of presentation and representation will be explored, as will notions of performative identity.

**Research Questions:**

What form might a performance project take if it seeks to explore truth? How possible is it to construct a performance wherein the distinctions between 'acting' and 'being' are eroded ... to the cast as well as the spectators? To what extent can truth be said to have any currency in art? What strategies of rehearsal need to be implemented in order to achieve these aims with a disparate group of students? How can the preparation be allowed to bleed through the performance in a manner that works against hierarchical distinctions between 'process' and 'performance'?



**Context of the project:**

*At Last Sight* will be made as part of the Drama curriculum at University College Chester. It will be presented in March, 1999 at the 16th Festival of International University Theatre in Liege, and subsequently in the Molloy Auditorium at Chester.

**Method of documentation, notation and analysis:**

Documentation through the publication within the thesis of the performance text (in whatever manifestations that text may take); through retrieval of any programmes and advance publicity; through written responses from the participants (subject to faculty approval); through a documentation of the ongoing thoughts of the researcher; through diagrams of performance venues and chief rehearsal sites.

**Necessary demands made on participants in the project:**

Participants in *At Last Sight* will be operating in a real-time mode, without any marked reliance on characterisation. The primary demands on the performers will be:

- 1: Openness to new and untried forms of performative expression
- 2: Willingness to approach performance as an opportunity for revealing rather than disguising 'self'
- 3: Ability to explore theoretically coherent matter within the context of experimental performance
- 4: Flexibility in terms of expectations.

**Description of the project:**

The cast of *At Last Sight* will be determined by the number of respondents to the published proposal. I have no say in who works with me. At present, I have no idea as to the size or gender of the group. This means that I could, feasibly, work with a very small group: three would be an absolute minimum. It is possible that non-assessed students could also be asked to participate. Due to the fact that *At Last Sight* will be presented in Liege, it is expected that the production will be relatively simple in terms of staging. This is not to suggest that issues of design are secondary, so much as it is recognition of the implications of transporting a 'set' from one country to another without any budget.

I am anticipating that *At Last Sight* will play for between fifty-five and seventy minutes, without an interval.

## Appendix Two



Level 3

Drama with Offenders Performance Project

Tutor: Allan Owens

Venue/s: H.M.Prison & Y.O.I. Styal & U.C.C.

This performance project will centre around work with women on Butler House which is the national centre for Rule 43 inmates. Due to the nature of the crimes they have committed they live in a prison within a prison.

The form and content of the project will be negotiated between us as a group and the women inmates. We have the interest of the women and the full support of the Head of Inmate Activities, Head of Education, Prison Psychologist and other key prison staff.

At this stage of planning it is envisaged (but still to be negotiated) that the project will consist of the following stages:

1. Autumn: Initial visits to the prison to establish contact and discuss form and content with the women and staff.  
A devising rehearsal period.
2. Spring: Performance in prison.  
Follow-up workshops with an emphasis on the social dimension and artistic and aesthetic action and intervention.
3. Late Spring summer: Performed evaluations of the project.

I am particularly interested in exploring how far the needs and wants of the women, the regime and our-selves can be realised through the drama process. Documentation of this project should help develop practice as well as highlight the potential of theatre in 'places of discomfort' to other outside agencies. It is in this sense that the 'Offenders' performance project will contribute to the growing body of research in the field.

The project will be driven by your creativity and will draw upon any skills you bring to the work. There will be a large degree of autonomy within the supportive structures that all professionals need when operating in this demanding environment.

A.O. 1998

\*There is no need for prior experience. A condition of this project is that participants would under-go a police central records check.

## DR3014 Proposal for a Devised Performance

Ideas about shadowing or ghosting in performance will be the focus of investigation for this project.

Starting points are a short, modernist text, *Footfalls*, by Samuel Beckett, and versions of the Phaedra myth.

The process is intended be collaborative. Students will be invited to contribute to all aspects of researching and making a new performance for May 1998.

The performance will last 56 minutes precisely.

The final piece will seek to capture some of that quality outlined by Herbert Blau:

“ [an] almost unabating intensity with which the theater (sic) has always questioned what it fetishizes, distrusting the very appearances from which it is made.”

*(To all appearances: ideology and performance, 1992 : 197)*

kate malone smith      july 1998



# Theatre of Image

*Multi-Media Experiments Multi-Media Experiments Multi-Media*

"What I really want to know is: Are things getting better, Or are they getting worse?" Laurie Anderson.

"Probably getting better, but slow-w-wly". John Cage.

## Wounding with dreams

an experiment with installation, performance and multi media.

This piece will attempt to create a montage of film, video, photo-image and performed image within the structure of an installation. The piece sets out to investigate design in performance, as performers become the designers. So it is essentially a work in which the collage of processes, becomes the performance. I have written a scenario for the work, which pre-figures the question posed by Laurie Anderson and presupposes that John Cage is correct. Our experience of childhood is the pretext for the scenario, which takes an extreme of adult behaviour as a model for the unlicensed desires of children.

The scenario can be summarised briefly as follows:

A woman takes a room to make a new life. After a violent relationship she seeks some peace. Memories become her companions, they seem different in multimedia, she joins them in a search for the 'real'. She confronts the damaging desires of childhood as adult games where there are no winners in the playground of her mind.

The piece has been offered to be shown as 'work in progress' at a National Conference for Drama at Manchester University in January next year. The work will be developed in collaboration with two groups of children who will illuminate and inform the scenario from their own perspective with dialogue and imagery. Some of them will perform in the work with us. The final version of the work will become available in June.

The work is about process itself and as such is the subject of my Ph.D. research. The making process will be documented closely by me and reflected on in discussion with those who participate.

Ian Watson.

September 1998



## At Last Sight

I'm looking to make a piece of work here that deals with truth and lies, with experienced events and invented histories; and, to a certain extent, with issues of loneliness made public through performance. These will be some of my own 'truths' and 'lies' and also those of the performers/participants ... one of the things I'm interested in is whether or not truth has any currency in art.

I have some ideas as to how work might begin on this (I've already written some text, which I plan to use somehow, although it's far from a 'script for performance'): I've some idea of length (between 50 and 70 minutes); and I know that I want to use film (projected film as well as video). I'm toying with the idea of collapsing narratives or performance styles on top of each other, so that we can use some film noir approaches in there somewhere. If all of this is vague it's because I genuinely don't know how the work will emerge (how could I without knowing who'll be in the group?) the piece will form a central part of my own PhD submission, so I'll be documenting the 'making process' tightly, as well as reflecting on that which gets made.

A condition of this project is that participating students would need to travel to Liege between March 1st and 7th; 'At Last Sight' will be premiered at a university theatre festival there. Accommodation and food (+ wine) alongside admission to other performances is provided by the hosts; it may be the case that students would need to find their own return fares. Depending upon the availability of the group, there are invitations to take the piece to other festivals. We can discuss all of this at our first meeting.

The work will be devised and exploratory in nature, a result of which is that creativity and a willingness to experiment are as necessary as any technical skills the participants might bring to the group.

John Freeman



## Appendix Three

28th October, 1998

Prof. Robert Germay  
Universite de Liege  
Place Cockerill 3, Bat. A2  
B-4000 Liege  
Belgium



Dear Robert,

I offer here a little more information about *At Last Sight*. There are three elements which are really driving the work. One is that the production forms part of my PhD submission, which is looking at the ways in which performances are made ... as such, the performance itself is being constructed within a strong theoretical framework of current contemporary techniques of making work. The result is a blend of illusion and truth, of postmodernism, realism and the real that, I think, will make for an interesting and original production.

The second point is that the work is being made specifically for festivals. It premieres in Liege before going on to Erlangen, Edinburgh and Casablanca, and possibly Lyon. Spoken text is in English and French. I have no doubts that even those sections in English will be comprehensible to any non-English speakers. I believe the piece would sit well within the ethos of the festival.

Thirdly, what marks this company out is that the seven performers are all 'real-life' lovers of each other, either current or ex (that was a pre-requisite in terms of creating the group) as such, their own histories, desires, antagonisms, jealousies, regrets, intentions etc. are constantly and constructively infiltrating the work. *At Last Sight* is a piece about love ... the challenge is how to do that without resorting to sentiment or cynicism. What is emerging through rehearsals is that the fictional elements of the written text (which is constructed as a non-dramatic series of my own memories, inventions and remembrances) are being radically restructured through the emotional content of the performers' experiences of each other. The written text is in no way an accurate projection of the production: the performers, all final-year students at Chester, are speaking only those sections they are drawn to, are altering words as they choose and are translating into French the parts they most want to be heard and understood. The fact that the text has an absence of action, of activity, means that our rehearsals are currently focused on the creation of physical encounters, of movements which are themselves developing into a sort of ritualised pattern of behaviour.

I am currently in the process of organising photographs, and will send copies to you as soon as they are ready. Similarly, I will video-tape a rehearsal sometime in December and send that to you.

Having made a considerable number of performance projects, both with students and professionally, I feel reasonably well placed to assess the merits of this work ... I am very happy with the way rehearsals are developing and I have high expectations of the finished product.

Technically, we require very little. I'd like us to play in the central theatre-space. We need one microphone, a stand, speaker and lead, house-lights plus two simply rigged states and nothing else. The set-furnishings will travel with us from England. The performance will run for approximately one hour, with no interval. I need some sort of firm black flat at the rear of the space ... something that can take drawing pins. That's about all.

I'll send photographs soon, along with names of performers, and a video of rehearsal. Anything else you need to know, just ask. We will need very little get-in or strike time, but one rehearsal in the space would be useful.

Best wishes,

John Freeman  
Senior Lecturer in Drama and Theatre Studies

Chester College  
of Higher Education  
Parkgate Road, Chester, CH1 4BJ  
Tel: 01244 375444 • Fax: 01244 392320  
www.chester.ac.uk  
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As Requested

### Biography of Writer/Director:

John Freeman BA Hons, MA

Editor of *Performance Practice* (copy included).

Contributor to a number of internationally refereed journals (most recent publication included).

Former actor, having worked with companies such as Optik and Insomniac, performing extensively in Britain and abroad, most recently at Spiel Art, Munich, in *Clair de Luz*, directed by Pete Brooks. Performed in the world premiere of Edward Bond's *Jackets*. Founder member of Two Up Theatre Company. Member of jury at ARENA 98 (Erlangen); invited observer and guest speaker at Amman International Theatre Festival, 1999; commissioned to devise and direct a new text for New York State University in April, '99. Member of ELIA. University lecturer since 1985: course leader MA Drama Practice at Chester; programme leader in Live Arts and Contemporary Theatre Practice. PhD research student (Brunel University of London), engaged in an analysis of practice as research, with specific reference to the creation of *At Last Sight*.

### *At Last Sight:*

This is a new piece of work, created specifically for this group of performers. The text itself revolves around the fairly common issues of relationships: love, loss, guilt, redemption etc., but this is given an added complexity by a concern for matters of truth and fiction, remembrance and (re)construction, which run through and inform the work from start to finish. What this means, for instance, is that whilst the piece is dealing with remembrance, which might be said to legitimise the random configuration of 'scenes', it is also emphatically concerned with the ways in which performance is constructed ... which carries with it an assumption (even an invited imposition) that the work itself will be comprised of a thematic and theatrical unity. The ways in which the work is made are thus made manifest ... they bleed through the performance, exposing their own traces as they do.

Truth and fiction vie continually for precedence: the performers are lovers and their own relationships occasionally clash with those 'fictional' determinants provided by the text of *At Last Sight*. The performers are then always working through their own histories at the same time as they are dealing with the present of performance. In a work *about* a relationship, we can say that they are, to a large extent, precisely that which they play; the nature of the work, however, is that roles are fragmented and interchangeable, meaning that those elements of 'truth' which exist are always already compromised by the 'fictions' which frame them. My own 'truths', as writer of the work, are likewise recontextualised by the fact that the words are spoken by others. *At Last Sight* is a struggle against artifice at the same time as so much of it is plainly and unashamedly artificial.

In terms of its structure, and bearing in mind the fact that the work is still in the process of being made, I can offer the following information ... although this 'sketch' of the piece is very much that: an image of where *At Last Sight* stands at the present, which may not be the case in March. The set is constructed in-situ. By this I refer to the fact that the performing space is defined and redefined by the performers during the performance. This applies to concrete imagery, such as the physical placing of space-defining objects; performative 'states', such as on-stage 'on' and on-stage 'off', 'acting' and 'doing' etc.; and the charting of key movements via chalk outlines drawn around performers' 'places'. These chalk outlines also serve as a link to the notion of police forensics, because the piece is also, in many ways, the story of a death. As such, a number of objects are intermittently extrapolated from the performance proper and pinned onto a back wall ... evidence of an act in the same way that the performance itself is evidence of the performers' lives.

Effectively, although not always perhaps discernibly, *At Last Sight* is a two act work: the first act establishes the context, whilst the second fills in the gaps ... provides the elements of story which themselves provide a purpose for the performance. There is no clear sense of linear narrative, although there is an information structure which makes the piece understandable. It's not about obscurity, or difference for its own sake. The piece has been made quite organically, with an order emerging naturally during the process of rehearsals. In this way, there is a genuine logic to the work and I am anticipating no real problems in terms of an audience's understanding. The bulk of the spoken text is in English, although there are enough sections in French to provide an aural coherence at those moments when there may be a visual ambiguity.



It is worth pointing out that *At Last Sight* is being made for an international audience and that there is a real desire on my part to make work which is capable of playing to a non-English speaking audience at the same time as it is built on my own 'traditions' and also those of the performers. So, it's an identifiably British piece, which is also, and intrinsically, a work for non-British consumption. I don't want that to result in some sort of homogenisation, a levelling out of all things to the lowest common denominator of 'all things to all people'. It's a sometimes awkward balance to aim for.

In terms of tangible 'reality' ... well, there are obvious things, such as the fact that any and all wine consumed during the performance is 'real' (it's not so much that you should be concerned for safety!), but there's more to it than that. On many occasions, the actorly 'as if' is sacrificed for the more performative 'is' and these moments - so many and so compromised by the performers' experiences that I myself am only rarely sure of the points where fiction starts and ends - comprise the most interesting negotiations of pretence and presentation.

We use music, operated by the performers from the stage, and likewise lights ... only two different states and one very simple 'special'. Again, these are operated by the performers from the stage. We use one microphone and speaker and require only a reasonable sized space to work in and some simple stage furniture too large to tour: a single bed, six chairs, two tables, a black stage flat. That's all really. It's a very simple show technically ... as the piece is 'self-contained', I'm only going to require technical assistance to focus lights and rig up an on-stage board ... the rest is in no way problematic, with a very quick turn around at either end of the performance.

What else? Well, there's no fourth wall and the acting owes more to Brecht than Stanislavski, although it's in no way a Brechtian piece. The text is original and I suppose it's fair to say that the piece is broadly postmodern in its look. That hasn't been the expressed intention, but my own background in contemporary performance has clearly pushed it in this direction.

In terms of travel, we will be arriving by mini-bus on Monday, March 1st (afternoon probably) and leaving on Friday morning. It would be best for us to present the work on Wednesday evening, although I am aware that that may not be possible. Technically, I require the following items:

- \*1 single bed.
- \*6 wooden chairs.
- \* Two wooden tables.
- \* A black flat or flats, measuring maybe 4 metres wide, at the rear of the stage-space. This flat needs to be able to take writing in chalk and also items (photographs) being pinned into it.

In terms of lights: very simple: houselights, a blue wash, a general warmish state and one special ... a shaft of light coming at the stage from above the audience. The cast will operate lights from an onstage desk. Sound comes from a portable player, which we will bring with us. I also need one microphone on a long lead ... the microphone needs to be one we can switch on and off in-situ.

I look forward to seeing you soon.

Best wishes,

John



## Appendix Four

**BEST COPY**

**AVAILABLE**

Variable print quality



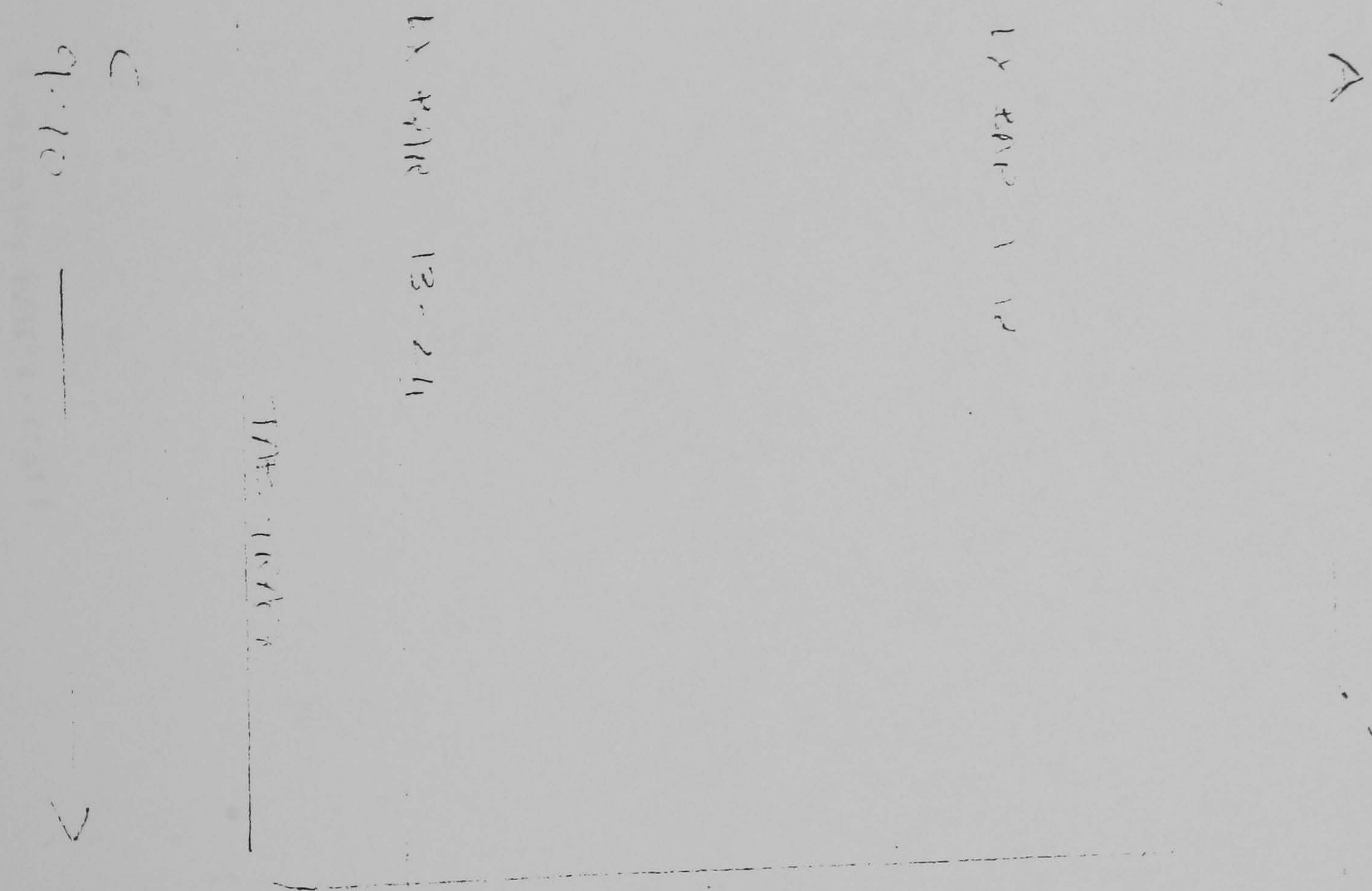
**TEXT BOUND INTO  
THE SPINE**

1971



# DRAMA WORKSHOP, GROUND PLAN

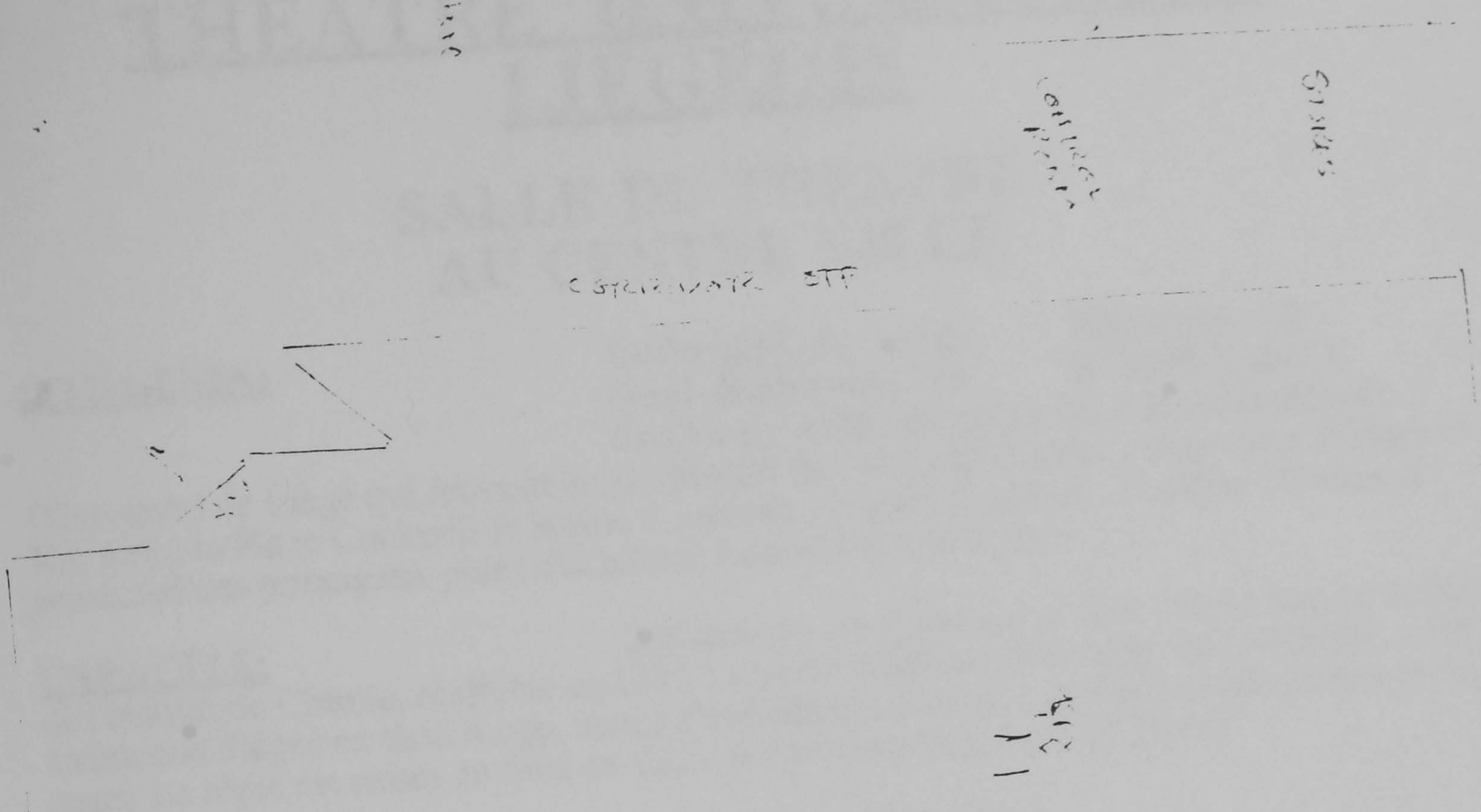
1) (11.11.1971) 13-21  
 2) (11.11.1971) 13-21  
 TO DRAMA STUDIO



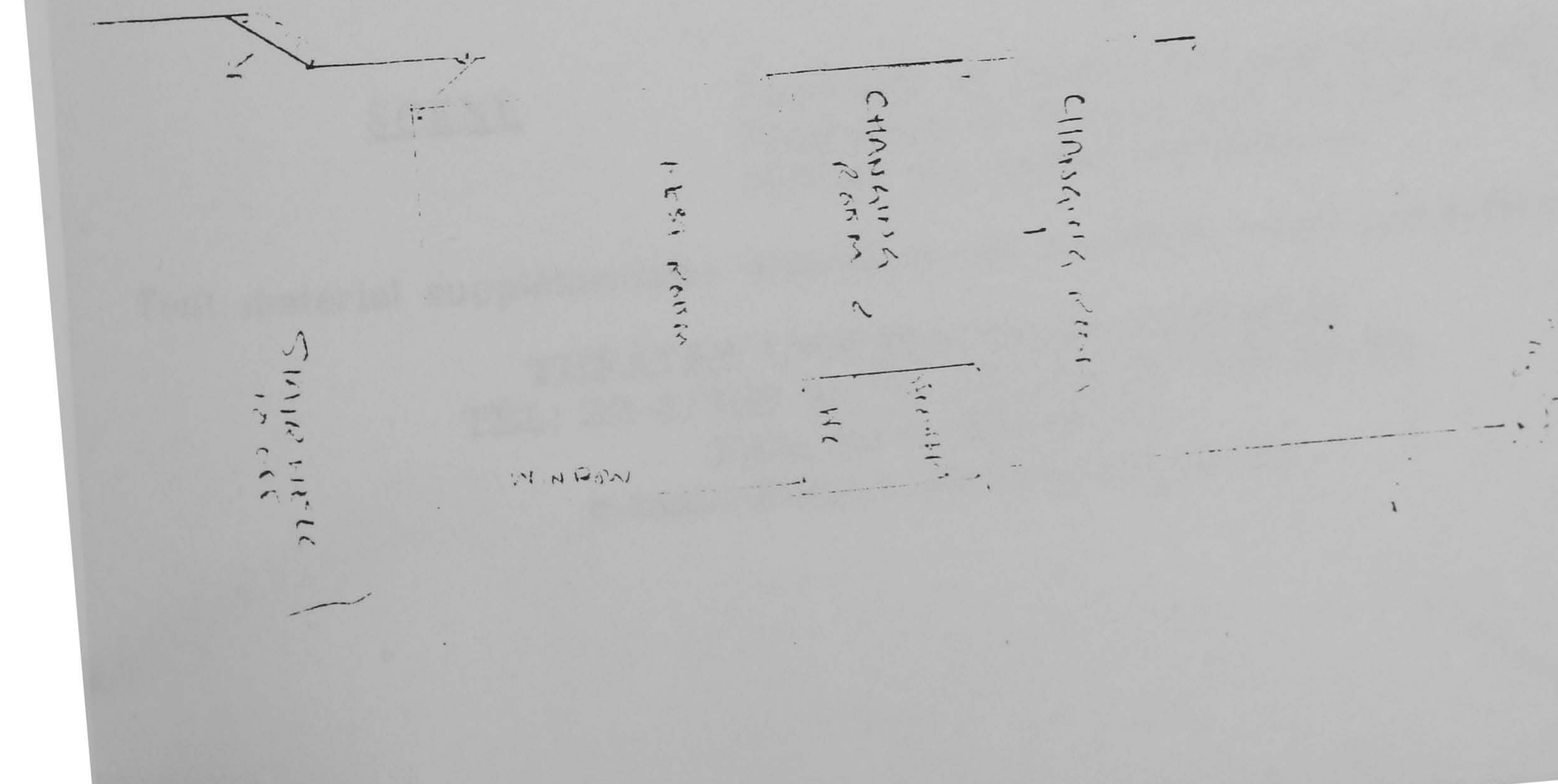


Map of Hall Stage Area 10/1/91  
Scale 1:500

Copy from Howard & Sudda  
JAB 2196 Orig 11/14  
24/12/89  
88  
K.M.P. 101



OLDING FENCE





# THEATRE UNIVERSITAIRE LIEGEOIS

## SALLE DU THEATRE AU CENTRE VILLE

### SITUATION:

Université de Liège      Bâtiment A4  
Quai Roosevelt, 1b      B 4000 LIEGE

La salle du théâtre est située dans les bâtiments de l'Université de Liège qui forment le quadrilatère du "bâtiment central", situé entre la Place du XX Août, la Place Cockerill et le quai Roosevelt, en bord de Meuse. Situation centrale, à proximité des principaux pôles d'attraction culturels et touristiques.

### CAPACITE:

205 places, en gradin. La salle est un ancien auditoire de l'Institut de Chimie, réaffecté en 1997. La pente originale, très raide, de l'auditoire, a été maintenue. Sièges en tissu rouge, munis d'une tablette mobile. La salle est également une salle de cours. La régie est située en fond de salle, dernier rang de gradin, côté cour.

### ESPECE SCENIQUE:

Aire de jeu disponible

Ouv. 6m50 /Prof. 10m (utile 8m) /Haut. 4m

Sol: tapis-plain gris-bleuté. Faux-plafond bleu foncé sur l'espace-scène. Une grande loge collective, sans sanitaire indépendant, à côté de la salle, côté cour. Accès pour chargement/déchargement par une cour intérieure accessible à de petits véhicules (+ 10 marches + 5m)

### MATERIEL: ECLAIRAGE

Puissance: 2 x TRI 32 A 380V  
Blocs: 2 x 12 circuits/3kw  
Console: 24 circuits mémo.  
Projecteurs: 18 PC 1kw  
8 PARS 64  
4 decoupes 1kw  
Poursuite 2kw halogène.  
Câbles, pieds et tous accessoires.

### SON

Amplis et haut-parleurs façade salle et retours scène.  
Mix: 8/2  
Divers: lecteur CD  
lecteur/enregistreur MD  
lecteur/enregistreur K7  
lecteur/enregistreur DAT

### SCENE

Fond noir en velours sur pont d'éclairage  
Pendrillons de velours noir (H 3M x L 1,5M)  
mobiles sur cadres métalliques.

Tout matériel supplémentaire disponible sur demande, selon possibilités.

THÉÂTRE UNIVERSITAIRE LIÉGEOIS  
TÉL: 32-4/366 53 78 366 52 75 366 52 95  
FAX: 32-4/366 56 72  
e-mail: Robert.Germay@ulg.ac.be



# PLAN

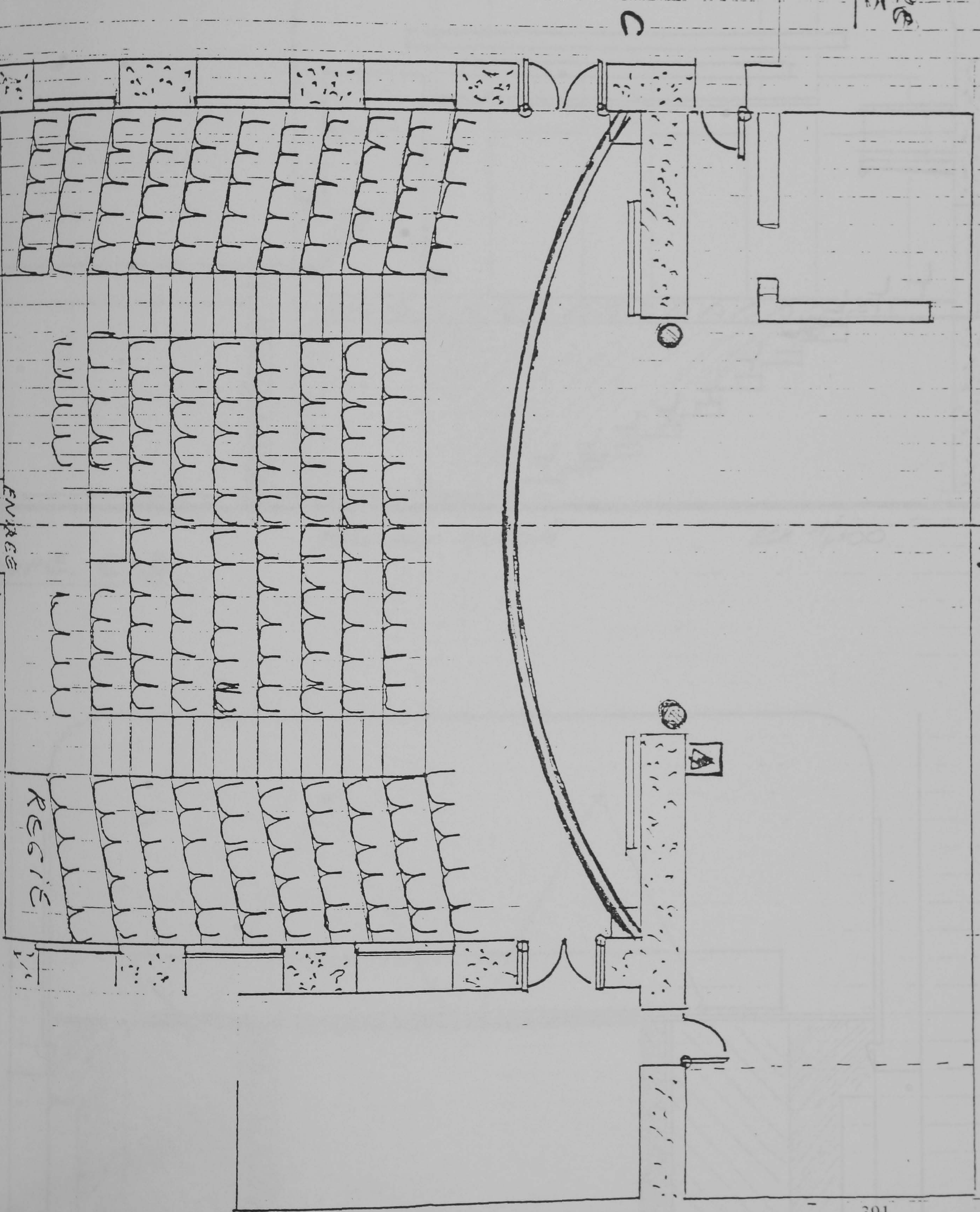
THÉÂTRE  
UNIVERSITAIRE  
CENTRE-VILLE

ECH 1/100

205 PLACES.

PLANEAU  
00V. 6450  
051. 3M  
011. 4M

SEC.  
32A 38V  
X

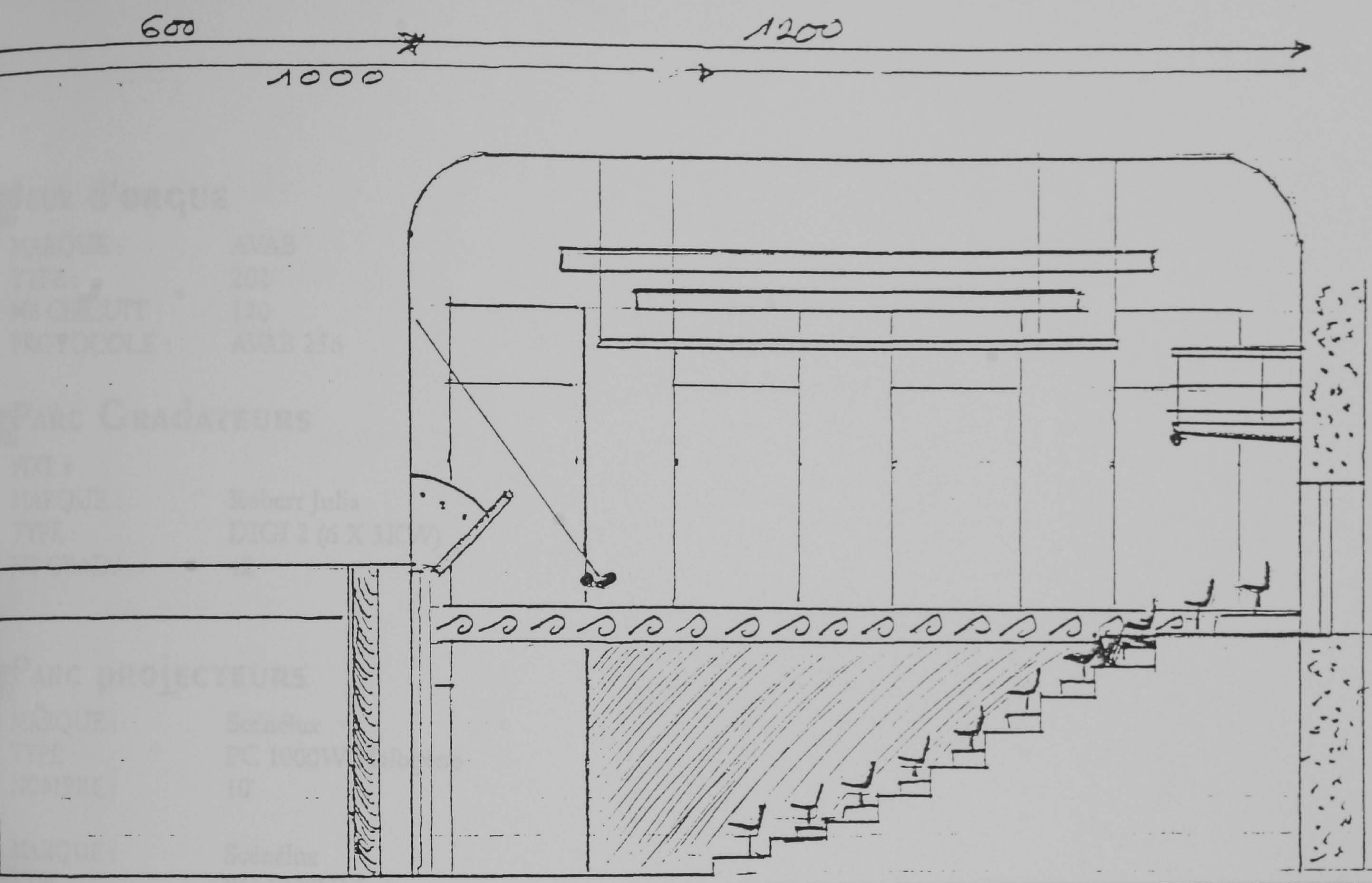


A

ENFACES

REGIE

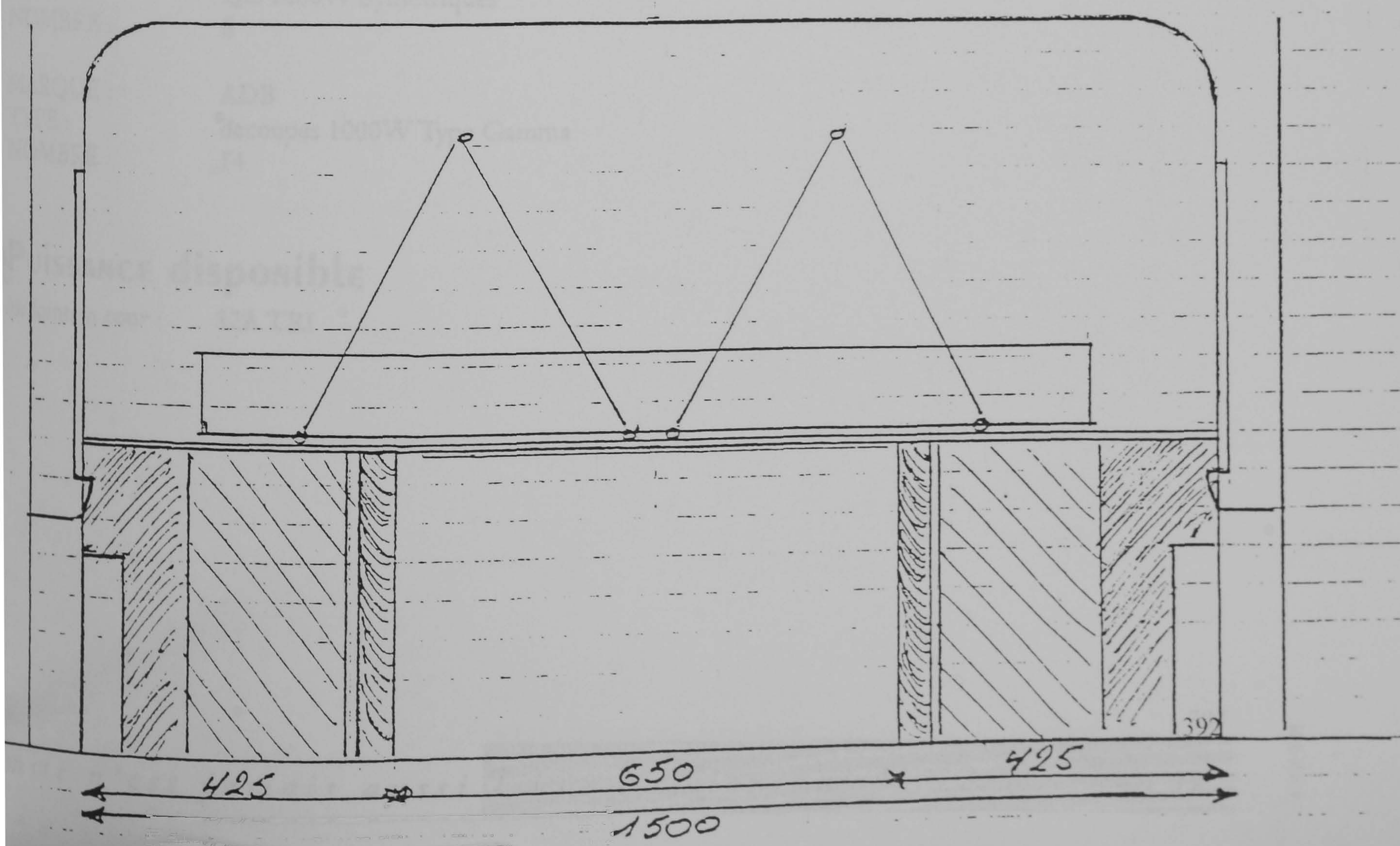




MESESURES EN CM

ECH 1/300

COUPE C-D





## JEUX d'ORGUE

MARQUE : AVAB  
TYPE : 202  
NB CIRCUIT : 120  
PROTOCOLE : AVAB 256

## PARC GRADATEURS

FIXE :  
MARQUE : Robert Julia  
TYPE : DIGI 2 (6 X 3KW)  
NB GRADA. : 42

## PARC PROJECTEURS

MARQUE : Scénélux  
TYPE : PC 1000W Halogène  
NOMBRE : 10

MARQUE : Scénélux  
TYPE : PC 1000W Episcopes  
NOMBRE : 15

MARQUE : Scénélux  
TYPE : PC 650W Halogène  
NOMBRE : 20

MARQUE :  
TYPE : QZ 1000W Symétriques  
NOMBRE : 8

MARQUE : ADB  
TYPE : découpes 1000W Type Gamma  
NOMBRE : 14

## PUissance disponible

Au lointain cour : 32A TRI



### Diffusion façade

MARQUE : CABASSE  
 TYPE : (amplifié)  
 NOMBRE : 2  
 PUISSANCE : 75W

MARQUE : EAW  
 TYPE : Pappel (ouverture 70°)  
 NOMBRE : 1  
 PUISSANCE : 300W

### Table de mixage

MARQUE : SOUNDCRAFT  
 TYPE : 16/4/2 4 AUX  
 RÉFÉRENCE : 200B  
 NOMBRE : 1

X

\*Tout le parc lumière et son de la salle Ravel est utilisable en salle Molière suivant leur disponibilités.

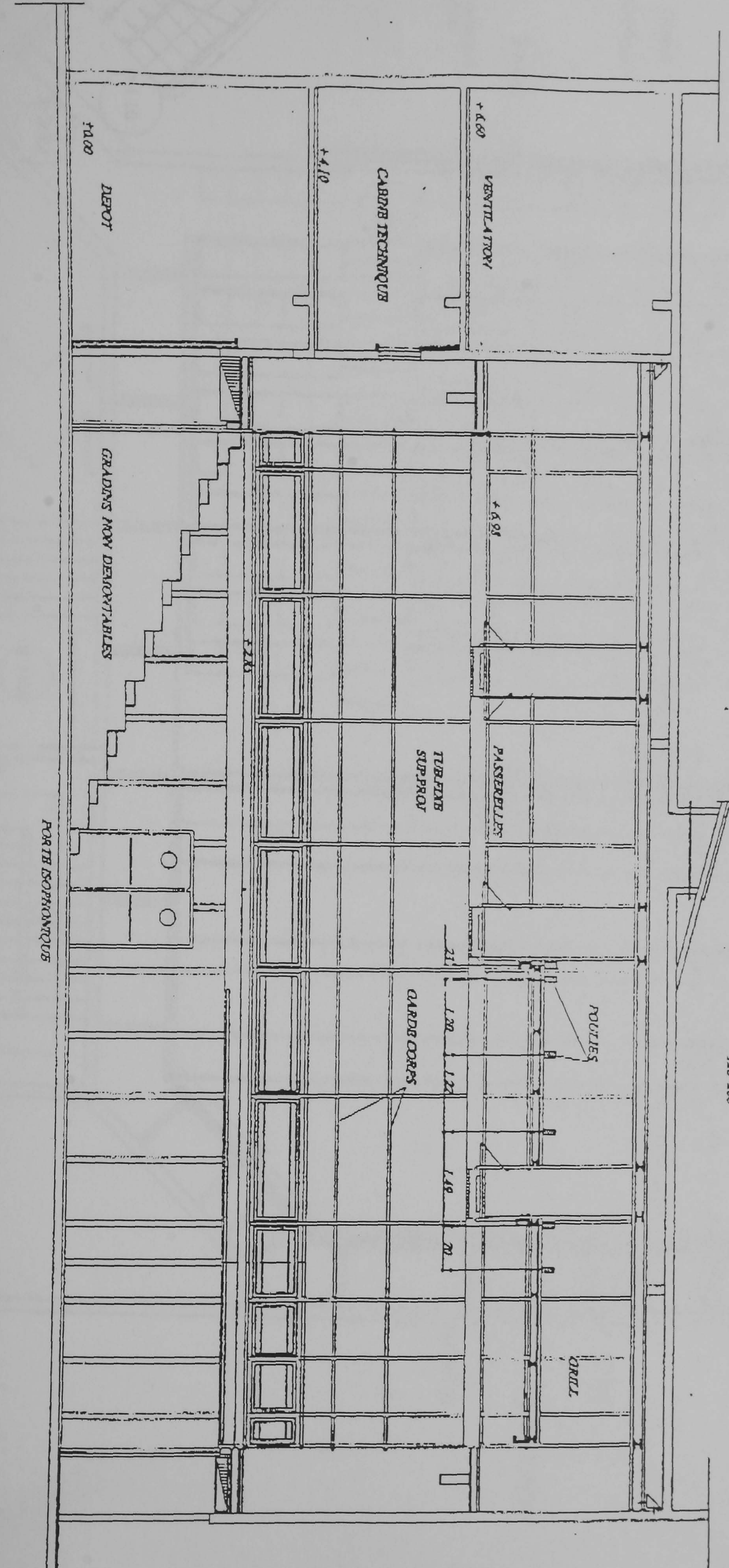
SALLE MOLIERE  
 1980  
 1981  
 1982



# SALLE MOLIERE

S.D. JANVIER 1966

ECHELLE: 1/100





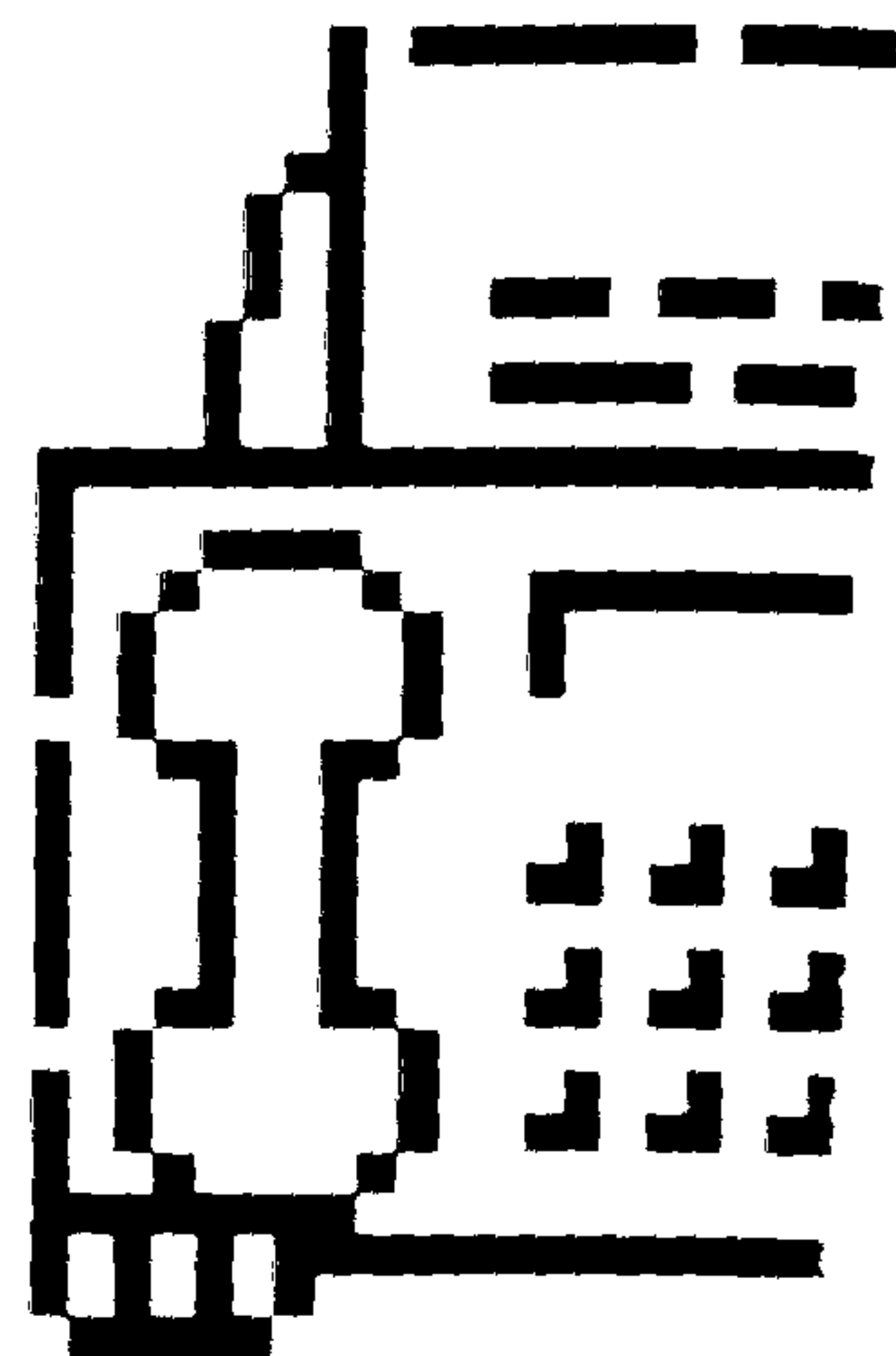




## Appendix Five



# Fax



**From**

*Naomi kate Edwards  
Apple Fax/Data Modem*

**To**

*QuickSend*

**Fax Number**

**Fax Number**

*01244373379*

**Voice Number**

**Voice Number**

**Subject**

*first response (WP)*

**Date**

*17/5/98 19:46*

**Number of Pages**

*3*

**Note**

*John Freeman Drama Department from Barry Edw...*



**JOHN FREEMAN**  
DRAMA DEPARTMENT

Two pages including this one

John Thanks for the stuff on AT LAST SIGHT. Some feedback as requested I wrote loads and then realised maybe there was some basic non alignment going on. When we talk about process whose process are you thinking of, your own or your's and the participants' ? From my perspective, as a director let's say, I always presume that I am talking about the process that goes on in the performers and the structure of the process is built in order for there to be communication between me (who does not perform) and the performers (who do) and ultimately for this to link up with the spectator (Grotowski's pontifex: bridge builder). I need to be clear about this. I have presumed in my response that we are talking about the process of you and them together. But you may want to tell me that we are talking about your process alone. In other words you could have a process of constructing a performance piece which would then be more or less complete before you met the performer groups whose task would then be to bring your piece to the stage.

Perhaps there is an ambiguity in your position over this, perhaps the confusion is in my reading. Either way, the ambiguity needs to be removed, it should be clear which process is involved. So, the following comments weave their way around this dual notion of process. Whatever, the primacy of process remains.

I'm thinking of the context: groups of students from different countries working on an international performance project. As you say there's GOT to be mileage in that.

My first response is to ask what's in it for these students. What I mean by that is: what's their contribution to it, and their role? Take memory: well, whose memory? Ycur's? What about their memories? How far back ? Ancestry ? Interesting. Jordanian, Finnish, German and British ancestry, going back over a hundred years, a thousand, four, how many ? - there's got to be something there (including people in hotel bedrooms). And this has got to have a compelling relationship to location/place for each one of them (given the history of the past hundred years or longer). I agree with what I think you've concluded, which is that I dont see what relevance Anglo/American cyber/cine speak would have for these questions. The construction of identity : how ? From the different propositions coming from the individuals in your group(s) ? What identity: individual ? national ? racial ? universal ? What is identity ?

I dont quite see the way in which deconstruction works here. I would concentrate

*Fax to John Freeman page 2 of 2*



on construction. How is memory constructed? How does this construction become apparent to others? Can it be? Before you've constructed something it seems premature to consider deconstructing it.

You talk about something being 'not explicit', but I would argue that everything needs to be just that: absolutely explicit, open, obvious. If something is implicit doesn't that simply mean that you are the only one who knows about it? Shouldn't your own process be explicit to others? But it is more than words. There is a structural question here. The 'investigative process of making' will inevitably produce something that becomes 'the made'. If it is not then where does the final work come from? So to ask 'should it be linked' seems to me to be a misunderstanding of structure, or to be asking something else, which you are not making explicit. When you ask should the process be linked to the made my answer is yes, not as an opinion but as a principle, because it could not be otherwise. Which makes me wonder about the question. Do you see my problem? And as you know I feel that the process should anticipate what this 'made' will be as little as possible. You can relate the process to the made after the event, but not beforehand. So rather than 'sticking with the known' (your known?) I would encourage the project to work with the unknown (your unknown?). The question then becomes what is the starting point? What is it that you don't know and which the performance process will make known to you? You also need a structure that enables action to take place. I would argue that your image (man in bedroom) is your projection of a possible outcome of the rehearsal process, but it is not a starting point, and it is not a structure. What is the 'crude' material here, the basic stuff with which you will work. You, the participants, the space you are working in, and maybe (using memory) an idea of another place, the place I have come from maybe? (to work with you). How will this internal become external? Questions like: what is the first thing you will say to the participants looking at you? What is the first thing you / they will do? What is on the ground between you? You talk about the 'known'. Is this what you bring? What does it consist of, this 'known'. Do you put this before them? How will you do this? Do they also have 'knowns' which they bring? How will these be shared, explored? What is your 'unknown' and what is theirs (the performance outcome?) What is the structure that will allow this to be explored and that will enable something to be constructed from it? The 'performed product' and the 'analysis' are different ways of looking at the same thing. The question is, what are you looking at? BARRY



From: **Self <VULCAN/JFREEMAN>**  
To: **Barry.Edwards@brunel.ac.uk**  
Subject: **Re: The Work**  
Date sent: **Mon, 18 May 1998 13:11:47 +0100**

Barry,

Thanks for your fax, which I've just read, and thanks for being so thorough. I'll respond as best and as honestly as I can. I found your responses really interesting and provocative. I hope I can do them some justice.

For me, it helps (maybe it hinders and I've misconstrued) to have an atmosphere, a notion of how I think the 'thing' might feel: a place to start, a mood. That's what I mean, at the moment, when I speak of structure. Not how the piece will be, but where it starts, which is not the same place for me as it is the performers or spectators. The space I'm entering with these performers is not empty, of course, we both know that, but for me there is also always (?) a sense, not of where it's going so much perhaps as where it starts thematically. So, I have notions of this thematics but none, as yet, of theatrics. I don't have, nor am I intending to have, a performance piece which is 'more or less complete before meeting the performers'. Part of it, I think, is that, prior to meeting and working with PEOPLE, all I have are notions. Perhaps those notions were stated in a way that made them seem rigid and fixed.

The process is mine and theirs. A process of making, which incorporates rather than excludes the pre-emptive 'stuff' of thoughts I might have about directions the 'thing' might move in. I have a disinclination towards certain 'types' of performance ... which means that if I have a map at all it's a map of places I don't want to go.

I am thinking of a type of melancholy, and that mood comes before the notion of memory played out in a rented room. The room gives me a concrete(ish) place to start in my head. A sense. I'm not writing performance text to take to Helsinki, although I have written words which I may or may not include in that which is created in my time with the group(s). You ask what will be the first thing I say to the group I meet. I don't know. Something about what I'm not looking for. Something about finding ways of exploring their own memories, feelings, responses ... of what? To what? To the 'theme' of loneliness. To an idea of someone, some group, some piece, some people, trying (or seeming as if they're trying?) to locate themselves through their re-telling, re-remembering of an incident that never happened. Of having everything to say and no-one to say it



to, or of being witnessed and having nothing to say.

You suggest that there should be no ambiguity, that I should be clear which process is involved. I think I'm using words too loosely, or else suggesting a closure that doesn't exist. Perhaps I am using 'structure' thematically and not as an articulation of HOW people create work (THESE people, THIS work). My image, of a man in a hotel bedroom, is not, for me, 'a projection of a possible outcome of the rehearsal process', but it IS one of the starting points, even if I choose never to speak of it again. I can't delete it from my own consciousness. It's a tangible place for me to start in as much as I either need or cling to, depending on one's perspective, some idea of a body in space, showing/not showing something.

In terms of how the work gets made, I certainly expect the performers' own memories, or imagined memories, to play a part. Maybe a stumbling block for me is this memory thing. I don't know if I'm more concerned with an illusion of this than with a genuine(?) trawling through memory. You say, rightly, that the made can't be separated from the making. I'm not seeking to separate, I'm just as concerned with the aesthetics of the product(?) as I am with the integrity(?) of the process. I'm not anticipating cultural ancestry in ways other than how these people respond to the NOW of making performance that in turn deals with the theme of memory. 'What is identity'? I don't know. Maybe that's what it is that I don't know and which the performance process will make known. A part of me wants work that tells secrets to strangers. Why? I don't know. It sounds like a sort of catharsis, but I don't really believe that.

You say that 'the process should anticipate what the made will be as little as possible' ... you say that I can 'relate the process to the made after the event, but not beforehand'. I don't mean to be doing that. It feels to me as if that which sounds to you (based on my initial fax) as the 'made' is in reality (Somerfield notwithstanding!) not so much a projection of the product as a way into MY process, for better or worse. I'm not seeing the product in terms of any specific images, but I am anticipating a tone, the hotel room thing concretises that tone for me, enough to create a place for my imagination to start. Now, how I tap into THEIR imaginations is a different issue. I'm guilty, I think, of allowing the 'blurb' to festivals infiltrate too freely my thesis-related analysis (I can hear you saying already that the analysis IS the thesis!) and certainly that's the case with my use of the term deconstruction, which fits more neatly into my spiel re the piece to festival organisers than it does to my genuine thought on the piece



I'm not sure about your comments regarding making the processes 'absolutely explicit, open, obvious'. To whom? To you, certainly (when I have them), to any subsequent readers of the thesis, yes. But to those who view the piece? I'm less sure. To the performers? I don't know. How do I balance my processes with theirs? If I make that which I want explicit, how does that not shape their own interests too strongly? To fit their approaches to my own pattern. Do you mean that I tell the performers, the participants, what I'm looking for and how I'm intending to look at 'it'? I don't know how to, because I don't know what that 'it' is. It's occurring to me now that I might show them our faxes and this e-mail, but, again, I'm less than convinced.

The 'known'. Rightly, again, you question what that is, and to whom it relates. The 'unknown' for me is the piece, the places it might go and the places the performers might take it. When you say that I need a 'structure that enables action to take place', I can see that that differs from my 'structure' of the room, the sea etc., but I don't see how it invalidates it. How I will work with the performers? What 'structures'? I guess I'm thinking of winging it a little - of setting up a working situation and seeing where that (where they) take us. That for me accommodates 'what's in it for these students'. They make work. They give of themselves, their own performative inclinations, their own stimuli, their own responses. Maybe their own secrets. Maybe the piece becomes much, much more than my notion of a theatrical construct who only knows himself/herself through memories of mistakes. Maybe the optimism of relative youth will subvert totally my projected(?) mood of melancholia? Maybe spoken language is the barrier (Arabic, Finnish, English et al) rather than the bridge to communication? All I know is that I can't deal with until it's done, or is in the process of doing, and that I'll return from Helsinki with thoughts, ideas, frustrations, challenges etc. All of which I'll be taking to the next group.

What am I looking at? Maybe I won't know until I see it. Maybe I'll end up looking as much at the way I'm looking as at that which is there to be seen? How the internal (the personnel, the space, the time, the differences and similarities) become externalised into a structure for working, for making? I don't know. I believe that the performers involved want to be there in order to make work that's new and challenging, that builds on what they have experienced, what they 'know', and moves towards the new and 'unknown' - that's the same criteria I'd offer for myself.



## Appendix Six



## ***At Last Sight***

It is here a book of good faith, reader. It warns you, right from the outset, that I here envisaged no end other than a domestic and private one. Here I in no way considered your interests, nor did I look to my own glory. Such a project lies beyond my powers. I have destined my book to serve as a certain comfort to my parents and friends: having lost me (which, indeed, they soon will) they will find here not a trace of my condition or humors, and thus will cherish more wholeheartedly and vividly the knowledge that they have had of me. Had it been a matter of seeking the world's favor, I would have adorned myself better, just as I would have presented myself in a more studied manner. I wish to be seen here in all my simplicity, quite natural and ordinary, without effort nor artifice: for it is myself that I paint. Insofar as respect for the public will allow, my flaws will be readily legible here as will my artless shape. For had I found myself amidst those nations that are said yet to live under the gentle freedom of the first laws of nature, I assure you that I would more than gladly have painted myself here in my entirety, and completely naked at that. Thus, dear reader, I am myself the subject of my book: it is not reasonable that you should squander your leisure on a subject so frivolous and vain.  
Montaigne, *The First of March*, 1580

This is a piece about a group of people.

This is where the piece begins.

Some people can just look at what's in front of them and tell you what's happening.

In a couple of years all trace of this is gone. As if it never happened.

You need to imagine a type of pre-fabricated proscenium arch, over here.

Fringed with heavy velvet drapes and lit chiefly from front and above.

Awareness of memory. Always lost, seeking elsewhere for a half-invented past. Against better judgement. About time. Always about time. Age countered by dreams. Awkwardness smoothed through the thin veneer of lies.

Before her. Back when she was no different to the rest. Blind to all that she would become. Borrowing images from strangers passing in the street. Begging gifts of love from loveless lips. Brushing dreams from waking eyes. Caught up in nothing. Consoled by fiction. Catching traced steps of the imagination. Carrying luggage in and out of rented rooms. Crying tears without substance. Careless, without care.

Drunk on memory. Driven by a lost faith in one's own stories. Dreaming weary dreams. Draped across a foreign bed where light falls everywhere without escape.

Every time is now her time. Each memory is of her. Even in sleep. Even in the arms of others. Emptiness, like silence. Echoes of all that was.

Finding solace in loss. Feeling better in the feeling worse. Forgetting not to remember. Frightened of the present. Fantasising wildly, uncontrollably.

Forging a false past.



Glimpses of a might-have-been. Glances misconstrued. Grieving for a never-really-was. Growing older through the search for past. Gambling the present against the never-losing past. Gladdened by sadness.  
Hotel rooms visited and left. Half-things. Half-lost. Half-real. Hoping for something. Hiding from truth. Hearing whispers through walls.  
I listen to the waves of never. I confess lies to strangers. I barter loneliness for lines of text. In rented rooms. Imagined places. Inside the worlds of others. Just her. Journeys only to the place she is. Jumbled images of truth and false. Joining memory with wish. Judging others by her borrowed perfection. Jealous of happiness.  
Killing time with talk. Keeper of a long-dead flame. Kidnapper of words. Kisser of forgotten mouths.  
Liar.

Important things:

Jake's secret Will Smith dance.

Good coffee

Journeys through night-lit cities.

The pseudonyms 'Bohemian Brown' and 'Lovelace Rocksavage'.

Danielle's deep sleep.

Photographs of parents, young and not yet quite unhappy.

Whispered secrets.

Made-up lives.

Lipsticked mouths and half-sad eyes.

Low art. Credit cards and soft-soled shoes.

Community shopping.

Frankie Dettori. Belmondo. Sinatra.

Backless dresses. Edible underwear. Pinkie rings.

The Little Audrey. Microphoned voices. Black ink.

New York City. Madrid. Monte Carlo. Casablanca. Spectacles. The nape of her neck. Asparagus. Gianluca's white shirt. Hopper's diner. The park in central Lisbon. Puzzling evidence. Steve McQueen's great bike. Voting membership of an immoral world. Tom Waits. Sleeping through Kubrick. Sleeping through Stoppard.

Recreational drugs. Out of control and falling. Faith in doubt. Sea. Sky.

Bricks. Imaginary landscapes. Armageddon. Voices heard through hotel walls. Architecture. Widescreen television. The Marlboro Man. The mystery of fax. Milk. The nation's favourite song lyric. All letter with photographs answered. Early exits. Sleeping on your side of the bed. Physiotherapy.

President Kennedy Comprehensive School. The colour blue. Those pale leather gloves. Your exhibition of shoes. Cashmere. Ou est la plage? The death of music hall. Ellen Barkin in 'The Sea of Love'. Jan Saudek.

Duchamp's vial of air.

One hundred and thirty along the M4.

A grandmother's tea. Escape. Departing guests. The pleasure of forgetting.

Soft fruit. The pewter nude. Mauri's band.

Mohamed's apartment. Black and white film.

Not knowing what it is that he's building in there.



I say these words:

Sit there and say nothing to me. Not yet.

And, listen.

There are things I have wanted to say

Although I wonder, perhaps, whether these words are the best ones I can choose to speak my thoughts,

Whether these words are enough to keep you listening.

Sit there, say nothing, and I can imagine you are listening.

A listener. A listener to my voice.

My voice needs to be listened to tonight.

The words I choose to speak need to be heard.

Je porte le jean blues et une chemise clarte en couleur.

Je suis nu-pieds. Je t'embrace. Je decris notre avenir.

Je te montre les cicaturices sur mon corps, je mets tes mains sur ma paitrine.

Je faits des promets.

Je ne veux que ce que tu veut me donner.

Je te demande a oublier mon passe.

Old paint. On canvas. As it ages. Sometimes becomes transparent. When that happens. It is possible, in some pictures. To see the original lines. A portrait shows through a landscape. A tree will show through a woman's dress. Black lines will bleed dark through the faces of saints.

That is called. Pentimento.

Because the painter is repenting. Changing his mind.

Perhaps, it would be as well to say, that the old conception, replaced by a later choice, is a way of seeing, and then of seeing again. Of second sight and second chances.

Dans le cadeau de la memoire qu'on ouvre, la chanson des portes qui ne sont pas ouvertes.

The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.

When I came upon the diary it was lying at the bottom of a rather battered manila cardboard box. Someone, perhaps it had even been myself, had filled it with treasures dating, it seemed, from my own youth: some negatives rolled up in a tight coil; a vial of water; held tightly in a rubber band; a pack of playing cards, red-backed with images of semi-naked women on the front; four lines of text on yellowed card:

But, child of dust, the fragrant flowers,

The bright blue sky and velvet sod

Were strange conductors to the bowers

Thy daring footsteps must have trod



... a small combination lock with three rows of letters, worn flat and illegible; a petrol cigarette lighter, long-smoothed by smoker's hand, and one or two ambiguous objects, pieces of things, of which the use was not at once apparent: unsilvered glass, framed as a mirror; a fragment of what looked like a white cotton shirt, smelling faintly of the sea.

The relics were not exactly dirty nor were they quite clean, they had the patina of age; and as I handled them, for the first time in a long time, or perhaps for the first ever time, a recollection of what each must have meant to me came back, faint as a whispered voice heard through a wall or as a face seen through the window of a passing train, but as perceptible, as known. The children of the past were presenting themselves to me, and as I held them in my hands I knew them all. Only the diary refused to disclose its identity. And how could I know of whom its secrets speak if I could not be sure whose hand had guided the pen that wrote the words? How could I know how to feel if the memories contained in the book were other than my own? Or if any of that which was written, which my eye passed over, had been the product of invention rather than experience?

My first impression was that it was a present someone had brought me from abroad, from Morocco, perhaps, or from Spain. A gift from someone non-existent. The shape, the lettering, the dark limp leather curling upwards at the corners, gave it a foreign look, and it had, I could see, gold edges. I did not want to touch it and told myself that this was because it challenged my memory. I knew why I distrusted it, as I knew that my distrust was born of fear. I looked away and it seemed to me that every object in the room exhaled the diary's enervating power, and spoke its message of disappointment and defeat.

I felt, with a bitter blend of self-pity and self-reproach, that had it not been for the diary, or what the diary stood for, everything would be different. I should not be here, sitting where the curtains were not even drawn to hide the cold rain beating on the windows, or contemplating the accumulation of the past and the duty it imposed on me. Nor should I be here, telling secrets to strangers. I should be sitting in another room, rainbow-hued, or blue, blue-walled, looking not into the past but into the future, and I should not be sitting alone.

And now. You watch me while I'm dressing, applying make-up. You see me here, in front of you, in public, on display. Am I becoming someone else? Are my lips painted red for you? Is this done for your gaze?

You see me. I am known to some of you. The words I am speaking are not my own. They tell you little. They are nothing more than a series of words. They are words without gender. I have gender. They are words in English ... but you see, now they are words in German, in Spanish, in Finnish, in French.

The words describe themselves and they describe a situation: I am standing here in front of you and I can speak. Do these words describe or do they



deceive? If I dress myself in someone else's clothes, if I take another's name, if I speak in an accent or language other than my own. If I convince you of the fullness of an empty cup. If I cut my throat with an empty hand, if I cry because of some imagined pain?

Even when it's different. It always starts like this.  
With a world not listening to nothing to hear.  
When, on this night, like any other,  
In this place,  
Silent, witnessed, watched,  
We are wakened by dreams too sad for sleep.

Two unspoken questions, written in the steam of bathroom mirrors and in blood on bedroom walls:

Why does the ocean taste of tears?  
And is a woman who disappears and is remembered  
More in the present than a lonely man?

The colour of light. The scent of battle or of love. The taste of wine. The trace of perfume on a long-discarded shirt.

The memory begins in a room. A room made only partly visible through dimmed stage-lighting. A room of the imagination. A room made of words and of objects and of light.

It's hours before that. Leaning in the half-light of a hallway, against a whitewashed wall, thumbing through the pages of a borrowed book, paperback or hardback, fact or fiction, it doesn't matter ... it's just a book. Listening to things half-heard and not quite yet remembered.

What does the man do?  
He enters through an upstage door.  
He washes in the water. She comes to him and sits and watches.  
She tells him that the magic of new love, is his ignorance that it can ever end.

What does he see?  
He sees her. On a boat.  
She's ... out at sea.  
He's telling her more than he ever dreamed he'd dare.  
He tells her that his heart speaks with a foreign tongue.

He abandons all sense. He gives himself over to the moment, loving her completeness and the way her face is captured in a shaft of light and the way she sits, erect and unashamed and self-composed.

He wants to look at her forever; to hold this image of her here with him.



He wants to listen to her speak until all other sounds recede; he wants to use words he has never used before, to speak them fresh into her own ears and to her lips.

He sees her framed between the shoreline and the sea: the breeze caressing her; the salt-spray moistening her hair. He sees her as all men see her and he sees himself as foolish and afraid.

He wants to touch her. He wants to lie down beside her in a hotel room where all are seen as strangers. He wants his words to travel into her. He wants her to see the way he sees her.

He recalls Luis Bunuel's words, not knowing their truth: "You have to begin to lose your memory, if only in bits and pieces, to realise that memory is what makes our lives. Life without memory is no life at all .... Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action. Without it, we are nothing." And he wonders what happens when invented memories become believed; and he wonders whether what he remembers ever took place; and he wonders whether the present without the past has no future; and he wonders whether the dead have the power to remember.

Lost, isolated, mournful, melancholic, weary, riddled with barely realised yearnings, awkward, alone, lost within the whisper of her voice, the languor of her smoke-plume, her enigma, her sadness and dignity, within his own inability to cry and mean it, within the past as present, as lost magic, as tired hope, in the recollection of the time when all the time was slow, slow cigarette smoke, slow nights and music, slow lights, slow heels, slow clothes, slow bodies, time slowed down to nearly still. Slow.

The moment of love's conception as the beginning of the world. Nostalgia as the afterglow of love. Loneliness as foreplay.

These are the facts. The details. All of the words have been spoken before. And this: this is the story.

Once upon a time in Europe, towards the end of a century. At a once-upon-a-time of endings and beginnings. Beneath the sea. Between that heaven and this earth, and passion and pain. Somewhere between desire and death. She, the woman, sees the world in all its colours. All its mountains and its trees. All its houses and its fields and all its people. All its lovers. Fucking in doorways and dying in each other's arms. Checking into rooms and checking out with secrets still intact. Undressing each other in bedrooms and in kitchens and in elevators and on trains. Stealing kisses behind locked doors. Looking at the other as she or he still sleeps.

She sees all the not-yet lovers. Those who know and those who love will startle when they're least aware. She sees the lonely and the left-behind. Sees the masturbators and the fantasists. The celibate by accident and choice. She sees the young and beautiful and sees the old. In every drop of



water, she sees happiness and misery. She hears every whispered word and knows the truth to every lie. She sees the living and the dead and those not born. She sees the flags of every country, every war and every corpse. She stands beside soldiers in trenches and mothers at graves. She reads the last thoughts of the condemned man and sees the bomb that ends the world.

She sees each grain of sand, each pebble, every blade of grass and brick and pane of glass and every film in every cinema in every town across the world. She sees the men and women that she's loved, and places them in order, according to their worth. She sees mistakes made and rectified. Battles won and lost. Hearts and countries conquered and lain bare. She sees the lifelessness of every planet, but her own.

She crosses towards him.

What's she wearing?

You would like to see her?

She's wearing blue jeans and a light in colour shirt.

She's barefoot and her hair is wet from either the sea or rain.

She has the eyes of the woman on the Nine of Hearts.

She lies beside him on the bed and tells him of her dreams.

When I sleep, she whispers, I imagine myself as older. Looking back on my life. At the same time as I live it.

I see myself smoking a cigarette in a narrow doorway leading out onto the shore. I see myself reflected in a mirror with a wooden frame, being kissed and touched by strangers. I see myself undressing slowly. I see myself floating aimless in a sun-warmed sea. I see myself in a car at night as it drives through cities and through a thousand miles of empty road. I see myself drunk on magic wine that leaves no ache and Tequila sipped from a man's cupped palms.

He stops her. He asks her to remember Montpellier. To think of the flat in Scotland; the bed and no breakfast in hotels with fading once-blue paper on the walls. The night the policeman watched them make love.

She tells him that her dreams are video. That she dreams their lives as film fast-forwarded and paused at will.

He moves around her. He's drinking in the scent of her; he's feasting on her. He wants her to remember how it was with them. He sees the way she moves, the way she chooses what to wear, the way she sleeps when she's alone. He sees the way she's looked at by men and he sees her indifference. He sees the way she carries herself. He sees the loneliness she never shows and hears the tears that fall. He sees the way her body shines in water. He sees her hands. He sees the way her clothes caress her body where they touch. He sees the space she leaves when she departs.

She sees the death and life of his own passion. She sees his age; his emptiness; his regrets and his remorse. His endless hope. She sees his lips move as they speak her name. She reads the words he writes her. She



touches her hair where it brushes her face and she steps back from the window and into the darkness of their room. She wants to touch the walls. To feel the size of the room, to know the limits of their world. She wants to tell him that she understands, that if this is all they have then it's enough, that love is taken where it's found and that wishes are the enemy of fate.

She wants to stay forever in this rented room, this place of paid for by the night, to hear nothing but their breathless words and the sounds of their own bodies where they touch and the rain against the glass and in where the window won't close and the sea as it crashes and roars.

He's crying. His hand goes to his mouth as if the tears were words.

The man lights a cigarette, striking his match against the wall and shielding the flame with his hand. He moves closer to the woman, whispers, touches her face. She walks towards him. She's remembering the feelings she thought she'd forgotten. She's reeling. She tells him as much truth as she knows. She's wearing the dress from Montpellier and the sky outside is dark.

The man lights a cigarette, striking the match against the wall and shielding the flame with his hand. He moves closer to the woman, whispers, touches her face. The cigarette is burning his fingers.

He's too close. She can't breathe. She feels herself fall. He catches her. He catches her before she falls.

And somewhere, a pretty young French girl is getting ready to meet her boyfriend. French girls are the cleanest in the world. And down there maybe one of those poor girls without husbands, who have to do all kinds of things to make ends meet, will be leaning against a wall. Midgets and dwarves like to have sex too, but she'll cut them down to size. I know enough about the Parisians to know that they are among the most uninhibited in the entire world.

There is a small apartment, by some ramshackle houses, and a young girl is sunbathing. Honestly ... a girl just can't get any privacy around here. All those voyeurs getting their kicks watching innocent young girls just trying to relax.

And somewhere, a pretty young French girl is getting ready to meet her boyfriend, or someone else's husband. French girls are among the cleanest in all the world. Maybe she's a poor girl, just sunbathing. Sunbathing in front of all you voyeurs.

Les acteurs ressuscitent les gestes et les mots qui furent ceux des personnages perdurant dans la memoire d'une homme qui, il, est encore de ce cote-ci du monde. Il essaiera de les rejoindre. Mais on ne rejoint pas les morts.



He smiles awkwardly at her, reddens and turns away, so that she might vanish. But she stays where she is and says to the wall, "I don't know what you're saying. Can we not talk about it anymore. Please. Not another word. Okay?"

"Quiet", he had told her. And: "Try to sleep." And he had known then that he would fall in love with her every minute, every second, over and over again, for all of his life. And his body grows cold in the evening chill of the hotel room, as he lies back in the darkness of the bed they shared.

Nights in unfamiliar rooms. Days spent waiting in pavement bars. A train compartment. The night train to someplace unknown. Somewhere between the glamour and the garbage, amongst the search for perfect moments. We are running out of time.

And the lights are flashing, Do Not Disturb. And the radio is screaming, Do Not Disturb. And there are flowers in the flower beds, and there are flowers in the vase and there are photographs in frames long-cracked, and there was a woman walking barefoot in an evening dress, and there was a woman who could sleep through continents, and there was a woman who sang, and there was a woman who always knew the words to every song, and there was a woman who always knew how to laugh. And there were cold walls on warm nights. And breezes through the open windows, and tears for no reason at all.

And an unwritten note, which would have said, How can you begin to forgive me, if you cannot understand?

And:

How can you forgive me if you cannot understand?

And: We know nothing. Nothing at all.

And: The heart is fallible and the world chaotic.

And: How can you forgive me if you cannot understand?

And the cigarette we shared and smoked so low it burned our lips. And the mistral and the thunderstorm. And the shirt of yours she loved to wear. And the journeys from home to here. And the reflections in the window-pane and in the mirror with no frame.

And the sound of the sea.

And the dark of the night.

And cities we've driven through and know we'll never see again. And the sea. And the night. And the search for meaning, like the search for faces in the fire. And the business of frightened desires. And the certain knowledge that our pasts are also always our futures. And the two of us. Together, in this room.

She says: No.

And she says: Now and forever.

She says: All that I can I shall make real.

She says: This four-walled world of ours. How can it be big enough for you?



The first thing for her was the loss of her voice. Unable to speak, she was left with everything to say. With no means of making herself heard, she knew at last both the power and the impotence of words. The first thing for her was the loss of her voice.

The first thing for her was the loss of her breath. This was like the time when, as a child, she, surrounded by her friends, had spun around and around and then been squeezed tightly while she let her limbs go limp until at last she had collapsed to the ground. This was like the time she had woken with her own hands at her throat. This was like the time that she had choked on dust. The first thing for her was the loss of her breath.

The first thing for her was the loss of her strength. Like being carried by a crowd, like hypnosis, like drunkenness, like weightlessness, like clouds. Without control, not even of will, not even of thought, not even of hope.

The last thing for her was the loss of her hope.

And these are words, written at a desk to be spoken much later, in another country, in another voice. And these words are written in English. And these words are chosen ... selected. Black shapes on a screen for eyes to follow and mouths to speak. And is writing eight parts memory or invention? And is art a lie that tells the truth? And why do we choose to share our secrets with people we don't know? And who, of those who listen, cares at all? And who understands? And in the speaking and the writing of the past, I re-shape the way things were. Structure the present from the wreckage of the past. Pick over the bones of the dead, like carrion. Dig up the corpse of text and give it life. Put words in other people's mouths. Speak now those words long-gone, if ever they were here at all. Make lies of truth. Place people in a half-invented room. Throw light against walls and faces. Trust to words and sight.

Et ce sont les mots, écrits au bureau pour être parlés plus tard, dans un autre pays, dans un autre voix. Et ces mots sont écrits en Anglais. et ces mots sont Choisis, sélectionnés. les Formes noirs sur l'écran pour les yeux à suivre et les bouches à parler. Je mets les mots dans les bouches des autres. Je fabrique des de la vérité.

Well, you said. You look beautiful.

You saw her blush. Through the skin and through the make-up. She smiled. As if she did not expect you to say that, but was pleased that you did.

She said,  
Well thanks.

And then she started talking, the words rushing out of her, everything coming too fast, too hurried, too rushed.



I thought I would get dressed up, she said. I thought I would have my hair cut and fix my face and put on something pretty and just go out. Just take a walk around the world.

Is it still raining? She asked. Is the rain still falling into the sea? And if it never rained again would the sea dry up? Would the corpses of fish and people rise up to the earth and could we walk across the world?

Who is she?

You want to see her?

She is a naked woman bathing at nightfall.

She is a sphere with several reflections.

She is the deepest river and the deeper sea.

She is the scent of chaos.

She is the place where darkness grows light and where the light fades out to black.

We see the room of the imagination. The self-portrait three times denied. The photograph remembered. The messages written in steam.

We see the way the world spins slowly and the fast cars crawl. We are in the cafe, with the never-ending drink. We are holding an unbeatable hand as we play for high stakes. We are swimming in the crystal sea and in the heated pool. We are riding motorcycles in the sand.

Untold numbers are dying, violently, or in sleep as we speak. Millions more are in pain. Still more are making love.

Do our actions affect the movement of the stars through the sky?

Who would weep for me but you and who for you but I?

She asks him then:

Are there more broken hearts than stars in the sky?

Do those same stars know their names?

And who among us has never known love?

Who else has stared unseeing into the night?

Ce spectacle pourrait être un hymne à la différence, une cartographie des frontières qu'aucun état ne pourra abolir; car l'autre quel qu'il soit, ne sera jamais tout à fait notre semblable.

It's raining. We undress ourselves and swap our clothes. We remember reading somewhere that you can know a person by their clothes and by their favourite book and film and by the way they walk. That to see and know these four small things is to understand it all. And so we change our clothes and alter now the way we walk. And, leaning differently against the wall ... we now replay the past.

A défaut d'éveiller les consciences et de changer le monde, nous livrons notre émotion. Ceci étant notre dernier don intéressé au monde.



It's raining and the sky is black. It's 2 a.m. it's in a room, some hotel room beside the sea. You're looking in a mirror and you can see him lying on the bed. He's naked. He's dressed. He's dressed. he says something to you which you only half-hear. He crosses to the window, lights two cigarettes, takes one to you. He kisses you. He tries to kiss you and you turn away. It's warm. The sun's shining. He takes off his jacket, then his shirt. It's raining. 2 a.m. A hotel room. It's earlier, downstairs. It's 1 a.m. it's midnight. It's earlier and you're breaking things, you're breaking things while other people watch. It's 2 a.m. You go outside. It's raining as if the world is upside down and now the sea is sky. It's 2 a.m.

Ne fumes pas depuis toujours irremediablement etranger parmi les autres, nous qui jusqu'au fond du souvenir demeurons etranger a nous-memes?

She says: nothing you could ever say could hurt me. And I won't come after you, not now, not ever. And she says: this is who I am. And this is who I am. And lying to me won't alter the truth. And lying to others won't alter the truth. And I used to love you. And every moment that we spent together in this place was wrong. And I should go down to the water and I should wash myself clean of you. And there are things I've seen and done that you could never know about or even imagine or draw a picture of inside your mind. And these are my hands. And I loved you more than you loved me. And I loved you more, so much more, than you loved me. And don't think I'm coming to find you. And you're making me tired. Just stop it with these games, alright?

In the time of the best times she wore your shirts and slept in the sun that fell across the room. In the time of the best times she spoke of the artist who died like a crucified Christ, naked and covered in snow. In the time of the best times she could wash your body with her tears and drink cheap red wine from plastic bottles. In the time just before the very best time she told you each one of her secrets ... whispered them all into your ear during one long night and by the time the morning came you knew her absolutely. In the time when the best time came you weren't ready. In the time you remember best of all she used to stand naked in shadows. But this you only half-remember.

The half-remembered best times took place in what was probably, or possibly, a hotel room.

What's he wearing?

You wish to see him?

He's wearing blue jeans and a light in colour shirt.

He's barefoot. He holds her. He describes their future.

He asks her to forget his past.

He shows her the scars on his body; he places her hand on his chest. He makes promises.

He wants only from her that which she is willing to give.

He tells her he is so lost in her beauty.



He falls.

You're packed and just about ready to leave. Sitting on an unmade bed in a fresh dress and humming slightly out of breath and out of tune to the radio.

You have pulled apart the heavy hotel drapes to let in our last sight of sun. You have said that there are no clouds and that you've never seen a sky so blue.

I carry your suitcase downstairs and we embrace in the hall. a white Mercedes taxi waits. I worry that I'm holding you too tight.

One hundred and fifty black and white photographs give the woman flesh and blood. The same watch in all the pictures. Five rings on four fingers. Silhouetted against the shoreline. Sleeping in unidentifiable countries. In cafes and bars, at airports and bus terminals. With companions or without.

If this is love, she asks him, why do we not touch? Why are you crippled by description, like a voyeur who sees language through half-closed curtains? Why do we hide from that which we write, from that which we speak?

Because words can cross the room to touch you. Because these words are gifts for you. Because I can write and speak you naked. Because we can shape disorder into paragraphs and chapters, into scenes. Because I can write the way you raise your arms to brush your hair back from your face. Because I can speak the way your hair is different from the time before. Because words can explore every inch of you. Because what else will remain when the sea has consumed us? Because of the perfection of your throat. Because your wrists are so slender. Because I mean at least a part of what I say. Because of cool rooms on warm nights. Because of silver jewellery against your skin. Because I am a slave to your beauty. Because these words are the confessions of my heart.

Staring into the darkness above the bed. Hearing age whispering about me. Dreaming unfulfilled dreams. Seeing my children by appointment. Turning up to catch a fleeting glimpse of all that was and ever will remain. I move within the orbit of my woman's light. Wanting only, seeking only to know the difference between tears and rain. Trying never to forget that beauty is rarely if ever found in the defeat of our expectations, but in the joy that they were ever there at all. In the beauty of hope.

The smell and look and feel and taste of you. The remembering of you. May it always extinguish each and every light in my mind and teach me to wait again until my senses learn to see once more into the dark.

You wanted to touch her. But you feared her sarcasm, her bitterness, her denial and her contempt. And she was singing. Not quite in tune and at not quite the right pitch. But you listened because she made the words sound like



her own and because her singing another man's words were the closest she could come to an explanation of the workings of her heart.

All those dreams that seemed so important,  
Well, mister, they vanished right into the air,  
Now I act like I don't remember and Mary acts like she don't care.  
But I remember us driving in her brother's car  
Her body tan and wet down at the reservoir.  
At night on them banks I'd lie awake,  
And hold her close, just to feel each breath she'd take.  
Now those memories come back to haunt me,  
They haunt me like a curse.  
Is a dream a lie if it don't come true?  
Or is it something worse?

And the words reminded you of different words. Words similar but not the same, that you had sung along to on the soon-to-be-torn-out-radio in a stolen car as you had gripped and held on tightly to the dashboard as the friend you haven't seen for oh, it must be thirteen, fourteen years now drove drunkenly out into the night of some strange, long-forgotten city you spent all those years in.

And she started to cry.  
And lean into you.

You took the glass from her hand and put it on the table.

She cried. Full of her pain and her loneliness. And you put your arm around her and moved her so that she was facing you, her cheek against your chest and your arms around her, and she kicked off her shoes and curled her legs up on the too-small couch and you held her. Until after a while she said you were the only one in the world who cared for her.

Elle a crié. Plein de sa douleur et sa solitude, vous avez s'embrace. en la tournant en face de vous. sa joue sur sa poitrine. Et vos bras autour de lui.

You said that it was hard to call her by her name and she said that then you should call her something else.

Call me Arabella, she said. I will be Arabella and you can be ... Paris.

Her mascara was smeared by her tears.

Hi, Arabella. When did you arrive in this hotel room?

Well, she said, I just got off a train. I came all the way from nowhere to be with you.

Nice to meet you, Arabella.



I am pleased to meet you, Paris. I hope you are not already taken. I hope you are not already in love with someone else. With somebody else. With some other woman.

Hell,  
you said.

I just have never met the right girl.

Listen,  
she said.

What have you got that shirt on for? It's too hot in here. In this room with the rain on the outside of the glass. You have no need for this shirt. All these buttons. What do you need them for?

She told you that your skin was smooth, and the fear inside you came right up to your neck. You mumbled something, started to speak.

She said,  
hush now, Paris. You hear?

She took you by the hand and led you over to the bed. You went to where she took you. Did what she did.

You should look at me, she said. You should look at me, and speak my name.

Arabella,  
you said.

And you watched her. As she undressed in the rented room.

Arabella.

There is nothing to worry about, Paris. The door's locked. There's nothing to worry about.

Yes, Arabella. I understand.

She said she wanted to know everything about you. And she asked you: "What do you believe in?" And she asked you: "How do you love?" And you answered her.

The rain fell steadily. There were sounds from the sky and from the street and there were also the sounds from the sea.

All things lost in the time it takes to turn a corner, or a page, or in the briefest blinking of an eye.

Do you want to see me?

I'm wearing blue jeans and a light in colour shirt.

I'm barefoot. I hold you. I describe our future.

I ask you to forget my past.

I show you the scars on my body, I place your hand on my chest. I make promises.

I want only from you that which you are willing to give.

Through the thin-ness of the walls we heard people speak.

Sssh, you said. Listen. And together you had listened to a man's voice:

My dear I'm just immersing myself in early Mailer: not his recent stuff of course, so passé. And ... I'm finding this populist avant-gardism increasingly



tiresome. And ... then I dropped in at the danceteria and well apart from the beautiful people there was this brilliant, totally beautiful guy standing absolutely still to an operatic soundscape. And. Have you heard about this wonderful new group-show out of God knows where? Painters a la Magritte who take all the characters from every Wim Wenders film, jumble them up with some shaky high-grain Bill Viola and have them tumbling through a chopped up Hockney-montage. It's a real pre-millennium neo-nostalgia trip. I'm telling you, you'd love it.

And she said. Frankly I can't keep up with all this post-postmodernity. But at the same time I so love the state of knowing-not-knowingness. Darling. He said. You sweet innocent. Don't you know that inesspressionismo was last year's thing?

You heard the click of their light switch through the wall without knowing whether it was going on or off, and you turned to her and said: Who is less real, those owners of voices through the wall or you and I? And would we know those people by sight? And which one of them loves the other most? And do they make love in the dark or light? And do they have secrets? And are their bodies touching now? And what colour are her eyes? And if voices had colours what colour would mine be? And how long after seeing you did it take me to care? And do you think their characters are logical? And do they move their hands before or after words? And whose position holds the status in the room? And whose eyes flicker most during speech? And how and when did they arrive and when will they leave and who will outlive the other?

Enough of that. I remember lying on your bed and watching you dress. I remember drinking the perfect secret drink you made for me. The dress you wore was black and clung like paint. I told you you were beautiful and you smiled. The room smelled of our bodies and I knew then that I would always love you.

I'm watching you dress. The room smells of you. I know that I'll always love either the memory of you or love remembering you or remember how it felt to love you.

And she said. I remember being pressed by you against the cold hard wall of a railway bridge. I stood against you as you touched me. I kissed your face and breathed your name. Your hands were soft and hard on me. I still can smell the air and the sex and the sweet sharp leather of the collar of your coat.

And ...I remember nights we didn't sleep. A computer-game of football that you cheated on. Records we kept playing on the juke box in our favourite and special bar. I remember falling to the forest floor and felling every tree we loved and leant against.

And you told her. I remember you on my shoulders as high as the sun. The lapping of the low waves and the plans we made. I see your beauty framed



against the evening light. The sorrow of your dark dreams and all the pleasures still to come. I taste the softness of your sleeping mouth. Hear the life-work of your heart.

And. In the speaking of it. He looks in the mirror and sees a child of seven, of twelve, a middle-aged man. A cadaver. Sees empty rooms off endless corridors. Grey waves, white foam, rocks and photographs of friends long gone. He sees a road which leads down to the shore. Sees everything through the wooden, whitened frame of a hotel bedroom window. Sees a tattoo of a heart and sword. An unmade bed. a cigarette end reddened by her lips.

She comes towards him. He hides his face. She whispers to him, takes his hand. They kiss. He faints. She catches him. She feels a sorrow far too deep for words.

I love you. Are my lips lying to you? Could my mouth ever lie to yours?

You're seeing her from across the room. You're seeing the way her rain-wet hair falls on her neck and throat. You're seeing the way she takes a cigarette from some half-hidden place about her waist and lights it with a lighter you can't see. You're seeing her. Walking through the snow. You're seeing snow on her hair and on her flesh. You're seeing the vapours that she leaves from nose and mouth. You're seeing her in a crowded place: a market place one weekend morning in the spring. You're watching her as she walks and searches, face turned mostly to her left: her hair has been cut and she's wearing a scarf and brown flat leather boots. She buys fruit. And a second-hand book in paperback. She sees you: the book is a present for you: she gives it to you and you sit down. At a stall, a coffee stall. You have regular coffee and she has ... and she has. She has a double-espresso. She has a double espresso and the stall smells of Italy and Africa.

You can feel her here now. Beside you on the bed. Lying here with you and her face is touching yours and together you watch breath steam from your mouths and there is rain outside and on the glass and some comes in through where the window does not close and your bodies are heavy, like stones and you can only move your arms and you whispered something to her in a foreign language and she turned to kiss you and the radio was tuned in to the long wave and your bodies were tan and you could see the palest line on her skin from the wearing of her wristwatch.

There was. A smell of coffee and the sound of traffic from the street and on the wall behind the bed were framed photographs in black and white of people you had never known. And her body grew light. And she rolled on top of you. She spoke in some Italo-Spanish tongue and you could understand her and she placed a filterless cigarette against your lips and lit it for you from a bookmatch. And you blew smoke above her breasts while she looked at you and she moved against you and you made love so slowly that no ash fell.



And who among them, she had said once, pointing through the window. Among us, ever stops, ever pauses to read the paper bills that the council sticks to buildings due for demolition or development?

Who among us. Does not inhabit a zone for forgetting and another one we use to re-invent our pasts?

Who desires strangers?

Who has made love on the concrete floors and walls of car parks?

Who is anonymous 100 metres from home? Who has gone a day without speaking? Who has killed a day by counting cars?

Who among us has seen their city at dawn? From the air? Through the windscreen of a stolen car? Through tears?

In a cafe full of late-summer light, you celebrated what you knew would be the closest thing to a goodbye glimpse of us by drinking as if to will the walls to collapse in on our ash-stained, wine-stained table. Without a thought for the candle flame that would surely die as the board and plywood left the doorframes and the windowsills and dropped to the floor with a gasp of paint and mirror-glass that ate into our lungs.

You are packed and just about to leave. Sitting on the unmade bed in a fresh dress and humming slightly, out of breath and out of tune with the radio. You have pulled apart the heavy hotel drapes to let in our last sight of sun. You have said that there are no clouds and that you have never seen so blue a sky. I carry your suitcase down and we embrace in the hall. I worry that I'm holding you tight and let you go.

It's raining. We undress ourselves and swap our clothes. We remember reading somewhere that you can know a person by their clothes and by their favourite book and film and by the way they walk. That to know these four small things is to understand it all.

It's raining and the sky is black. It's two a.m. It's in a room, some hotel room beside the sea. You're looking in a mirror and you can see him lying on the bed. He is naked. No. He's dressed. He's dressed. He says something to you, which you only half hear. He crosses to the window. Lights two cigarettes, and takes one to you. He kisses you. He tries to kiss you and you turn away. It's warm. So he takes off his jacket, then his light in colour shirt. It's raining. Two a.m. A hotel room. It's earlier. What time is it? It's two a.m. It's midnight.

She says. Nothing you could ever say could hurt me, and I won't come after you, not now, not ever. She says, this is who I am, and this is who I am. And lying to me won't alter the truth and I used to love you and every moment we spent together in this place was wrong and I should go down to the water and I should wash myself clean of you and there are things I've seen that you



could never know about or even imagine or draw a picture of inside your mind. And these are my hands. These are my hands. And I loved you more than you loved me and I loved you more, much more, than you loved me and I loved you. And don't go confusing love with lust. And. And you're making me tired. Just stop it with these games, alright.

It's two a.m. He's naked on the bed and there's a window open and the rain is leaking into the room.

In the bed with her it is dark. And she says: "Let me tell you something. I have to spoil things now. I have to dress and leave."

And he says "No. Just stay."

"But I have to go", she breathes into his mouth. "It's risky enough already. I don't want to make things worse."

"Alright", he says.

"Please". She touches his arm. "Don't hate me."

"I don't hate you", he says. He sits up in the bed. He speaks falteringly, as though the words are in a foreign tongue. "It's just that I hate to see you leave."

"I know", she tells him. "I hate it too."

There, in the darkness of the room, she rises from the bed. He can hear the rustling of fabric as she, as you, begin to dress, to put on your clothes. The sound is difficult for me to take. You're getting dressed to walk out of here and it's not easy to take.

"Arabella ..."

"Yes?"

"Let's go away."

"What? What's that?"

"We'll go away. It's the only thing we can do."

"But ..."

"Look, I know it's wrong. It's wrong. It's all wrong."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Pack some things. Write a note. Meet me at the station, at the harbour, at the airport, at the side of the road. Meet me in the lobby, in the car park. Wait for me in the corridor, in the dark, by the elevator. Wait for me and I'll find you."

You finish dressing. There's no further talk. I try to count the floorboards, imagining them as minutes till you leave. "Arabella."

Describe the room.

You would like to see the room?

It is not too small for two people to conduct or end a love affair in. It has no nice French windows. Its view is of the sea. The window is both tall and wide. There are no bookshelves built into the walls, no books of poetry or prayer. No dusty Japanese paper shade protects the bulb.

What would you write on the walls, you asked her, if your blood were ink?

And she had said, immediately, as though without thought: loneliness, darkness, light, foolishness, stumbling, awkwardness, realisation, choices,



loss, blindness, recognition, insomnia, thirst, hunger, memory, fear, poverty, remembrance, amputation, solitude, silence, incompatibility, the present and the past. And these words are my blood; my own red tears. And you had looked at her, sitting in the hard-backed chair, where the light from outside made the particles of dust cut through the air and where you could see only blue behind her, and you had tried to smile and make light of her list and she had held your gaze and in that moment you had known that nothing else mattered. That she was like a tattoo covering your life from start to finish, like the journey of your own blood through your own at-rest body. And you had closed your eyes then, feeling and knowing the impossibility of at-peace, and your lids had felt heavy on your eyes and you had wished the room smaller and the sea closer still and her mouth exactly as it was and the line of her body no different and the light that circled her and the space between her and you and you had snapped your eyes open, afraid that she had gone, afraid that she had turned herself to light. To dust.

If I raise my eyes from here, from this place now, I can see where the sea meets the sky. I can see the stars, like fires through the clouds. The woman had asked him to swim below the surface. On a night so dark that the ocean was no blacker than the sky. On a night much like this night. To swim together without a sound. And on this night they were, they are, as beautiful as one another. On this one night they can still speak in tongues. On this dark night our bodies glow, and on this night, tonight, for one night only, our dreams are cinema and our capacity for alcohol is incredible and every want we ever wished for could be ours without pain and everyone who has ever cried is on our side. On their side.

The trace of sadness at the water's edge. Where water is off-stage and only ever described, suggested, spoken of as though the words made sense. They touch each other. She leads him. The letters he sent her saying, "Meet Me Whenever You Can". The wanting and the never speaking.

The last time he saw her she was dressed in blue and white.

The last time he saw her she was wearing a dress so dark her skin shone where the flesh was bare.

The last time he saw her it rained forever.

The last time he saw her she was sleeping and the radio was on, or off ... he can't remember.

The last time he saw her was before she stopped smoking cigarettes.

The last time he saw her she had just received news of the death of a friend.

The last time he saw her was when the room spun.

The last time he saw her she was lying naked on a beach in France.

The last time he touched her was in a cheap hotel in Paris.

The last time you saw her she was telling you about her dreams.

The last time you saw her was through the open window.

The last time you saw her was at a party in Montpellier.

The last time you saw her was before you knew her, when she was knocked off her bicycle.

The last time you saw her she was looking through the skylight.



The last time the woman whispered he couldn't understand the words or even hear them properly.

The last time he saw her was on the train home from Liege, when she had the psychic flash.

The last time that he thinks he saw her was when she was shopping in a store called 'Love Museum'.

The last day you saw her was the day you saw her in a supermarket buying fruit.

The last time she spoke to him he couldn't hear the words.

The last time the man heard her speak was when she told him that the sky was dark.

The last words he heard her speak were in a foreign language.

The last time he touched her face was in the elevator.

The last night that he watched her sleep was when her dress lay by the door.

The last time they spoke was when she was drunk and tried to cheat at cards.

The last time they spoke was when she asked him his name.

The last time they danced to music was on the evening of the wedding of a friend.

The last time they danced was to 'The Magic of Shirley Bassey'.

The last time she danced was to something by The Fugees shown on MTV in Lisbon.

The last time he thinks he saw her dance was to Finlay Quaye heard through the wall.

The last time he saw her was on the night the moon seduced them.

The last time he saw her was in a black and white film as a train left the station.

The last time he saw the woman was on the night she tried to change the world.

The last time he saw her was the day he cut his hand on broken glass.

The last time he saw her was the time he went three days without a word.

The last time he saw her was when it ended and it all began.

The last time he saw her she was naked and the room was cold.

The last time he saw her she was running in slow motion.

The last time that they met was on a balcony in Barcelona.

The last time they made love she spoke to him in Spanish.

The last time they drank together was the time they drank Chianti.

The last time they touched it was only just the touching of their legs together.

The last time that he didn't see her was the time she travelled to Vienna.

She wets her hair . And ties it back.

And when she comes to him, at night, she kneels above him.

What next?

You want to know her?

The curve of her back where it dips. The nape of her neck. The width of her mouth. Her shoulder blades, the way they arc. The nakedness beneath her clothes.



What next?

A land without language. A dark hotel. Her strength. The view from the window across the sand. The way she holds the silences. What next? What next? The first kiss and the last. The blue-tiled bathroom and the bareness of the bulb. What next? The wanting you so long it almost went away.

Images happening without warning in the mind. Like remembered fragments of a dream. Like lightning which illuminates memory, like a self-stricken photographer. Images of her, off-centre: out-of-focus snapshots taken by a drunk in a too-dark room. Like a neon sign screaming "Fuck all this lying." "Fuck all this lying." Like flashbacks from a damaged night. Like half-heard whispers in a cave. Like a memory of a face glimpsed once in the heaving nightclub of your own lost youth. Or seen in a train station late at night. Or in the briefest holding of a glance as strangers pass. In the unseen contact of an unknown hand. In the dream that you store in the back of your mind until sleep lets you visit again. Like an unsigned letter. Like the trace of two names carved, a thousand lifetimes ago, into a tree long-since destroyed.

And she said, where does love come from? And where does it go to when it leaves?

And she said. Let's invent names for ourselves.

And let's imagine that this room is the world.

And you called her Arabella. Because that was the name she desired.

And she called you Paris.

And the rain fell as if it could wash away every footprint on the earth.

And the rain ran like tears along the window and into your room.

And within your four-walled world you were together and nothing and no-one could touch you.

And all that had passed before the moment was erased.

And you knew that the future could only harm you once you stopped living life in the present. And the woman who had become Arabella moved around the room like mist. And the woman you called Arabella was a woman who called you Paris.

Paris, she said. Will you swim with me?

Will you leave this room and swim with me in the sea?

Will you, Paris?

Will you?

And I am touching you, where your throat meets your shoulder.

And I'm touching you where your wrist becomes your hand.

Arabella.

Arabella.

And I know that the past can only harm me when the present is lost.

And you said that you would open the window and let the rain fill our room.

And that the bed would be an island, a country.

And that we could swim together and yet never leave the room.

And she could have risen on a sea of rain and tears.

And she was leaning against the wall to the left of the door.

And she was smoking a cigarette from the never-ending pack of the way I recall it.



And she was standing in such a way that you could see her from all angles.  
And her eyes were open.  
And her lips were slightly apart and the colour of the walls was blue.  
And she was barefoot and her shirt was light in colour and her jeans were not quite the blue of the walls and not quite the blue of her eyes.  
And on her wrist was the thin line of pale from her watch.  
And is it time that moves, or do we move through it? And who says that the past is another country?  
And she crosses to the window.  
And I look again, and she's wearing a black dress, and her hair is different, and the room's the same, and the bed I'm lying on is the bed I shared with Arabella.  
And I'm seeing the reflection of her face in the glass.  
And the rain reads like tears on her face.  
And who can tell the difference between tears and rain?  
And who knows the difference between tears and rain?  
And is a woman who is remembered more or less in the present than an isolated man?  
And she's tuning in the radio on the shelf by the bed.  
And she's pausing on sections of songs.  
And she's naked in the half-light from the forty-watt bulb.  
And she's lost in a book called 'Nothing to Say'.  
And she's reading the letter she chose not to send.  
And I trace a route in her lipstick across a map of the world.  
And I watch her as she brushes knots from her hair.  
And as she drinks from a glass.  
And I ask her where bullets fired into the sky come down.  
And I ask her whether memory is the same thing as remembrance.  
And I ask her whether liars can ever be trusted.  
And I remember to ask her if she thinks that the sea is a woman.  
And I think I can remember to ask her to tell me why the ocean tastes of tears.

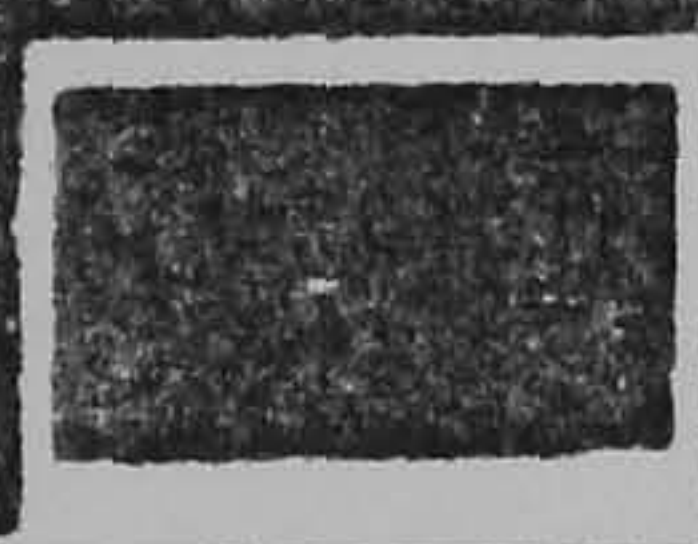
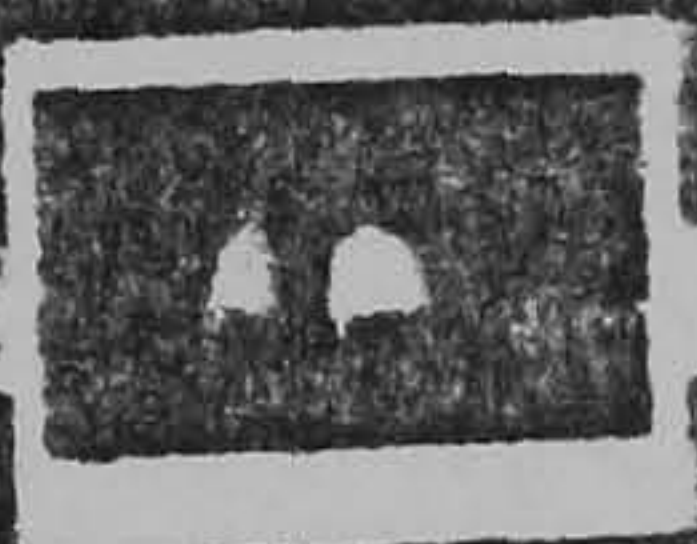
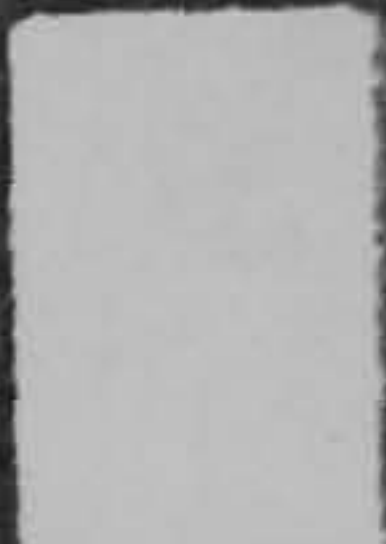
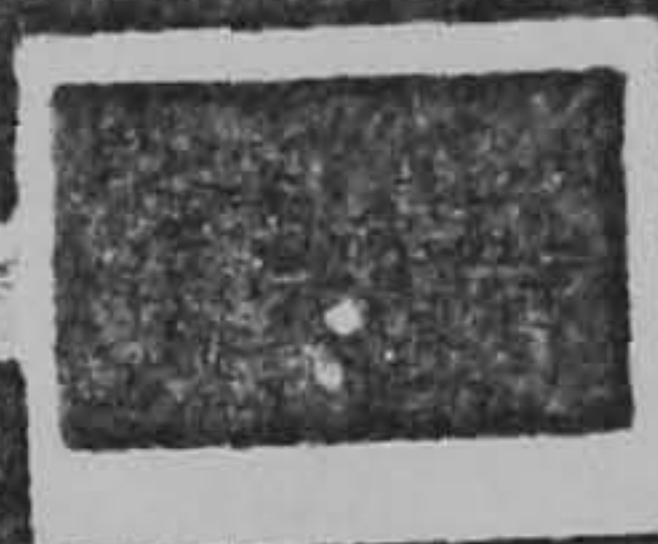
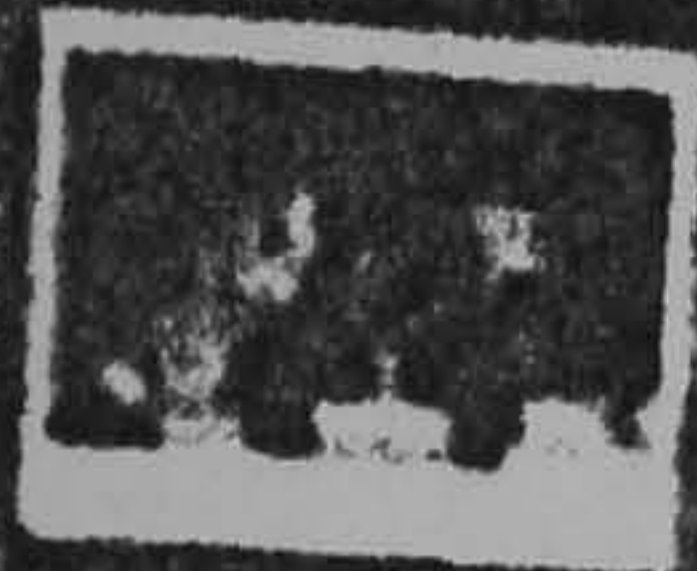
And the room is as dark now as the sky beyond the glass.  
And Arabella is as dark now as the night beyond the glass.  
And her shape is consumed by the shape of the room.  
And the sound of her breath ... is the sound of the rain.

In the silence of thought we sit. No more than a written trace without an origin. An ageless still-life. Locked into the moment, devoid of destination. Seeing traces of you at the edge of the sea. Remembering an invented time when things were otherwise and things were worse. Feeding off neither hope nor despair. Existing halfway between the grave and the womb. Between darkness and light. Close to the point where memory blurs with imagination.  
At  
a place where our breaths barely mist the glass.

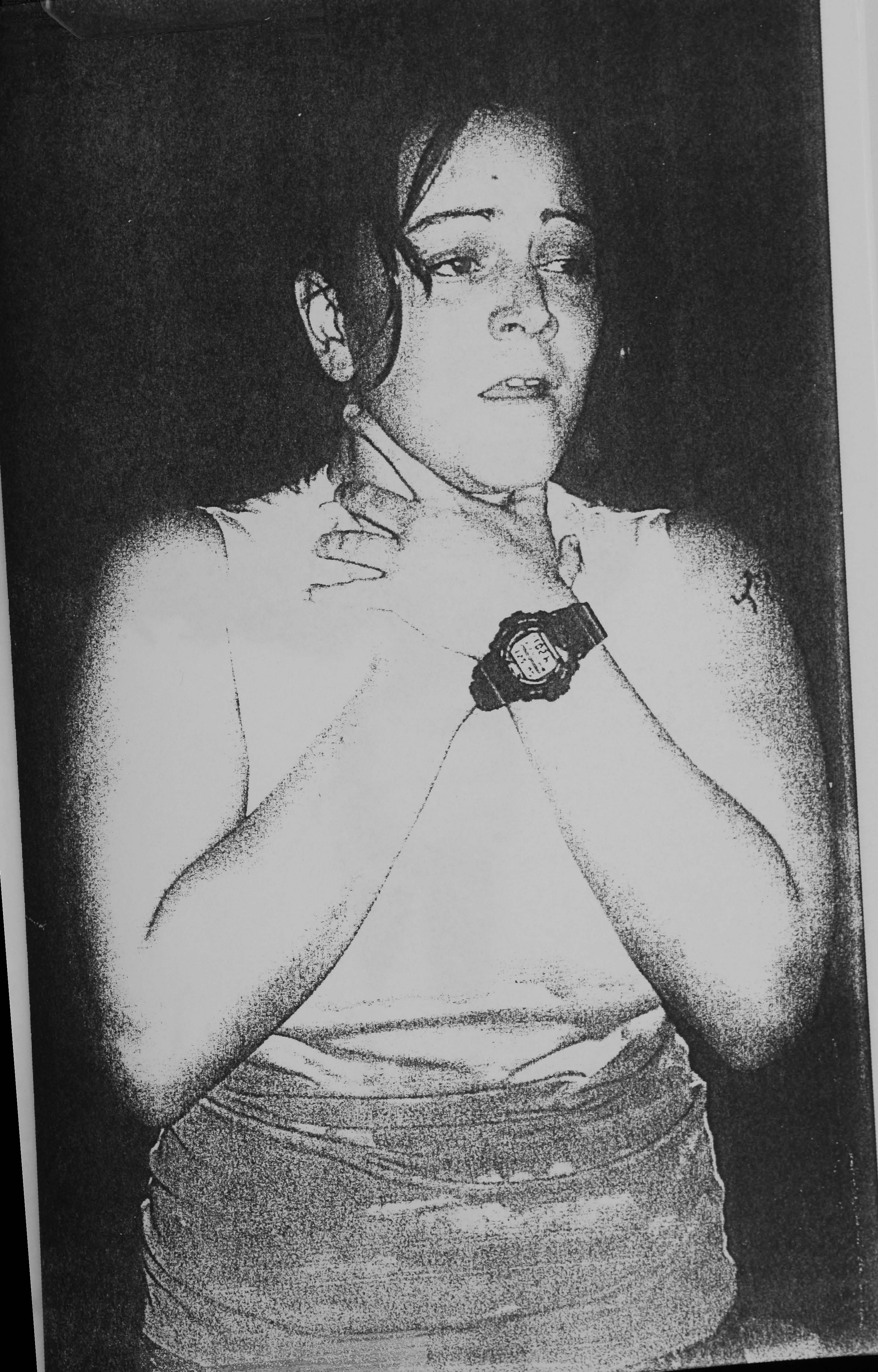


## Appendix Seven





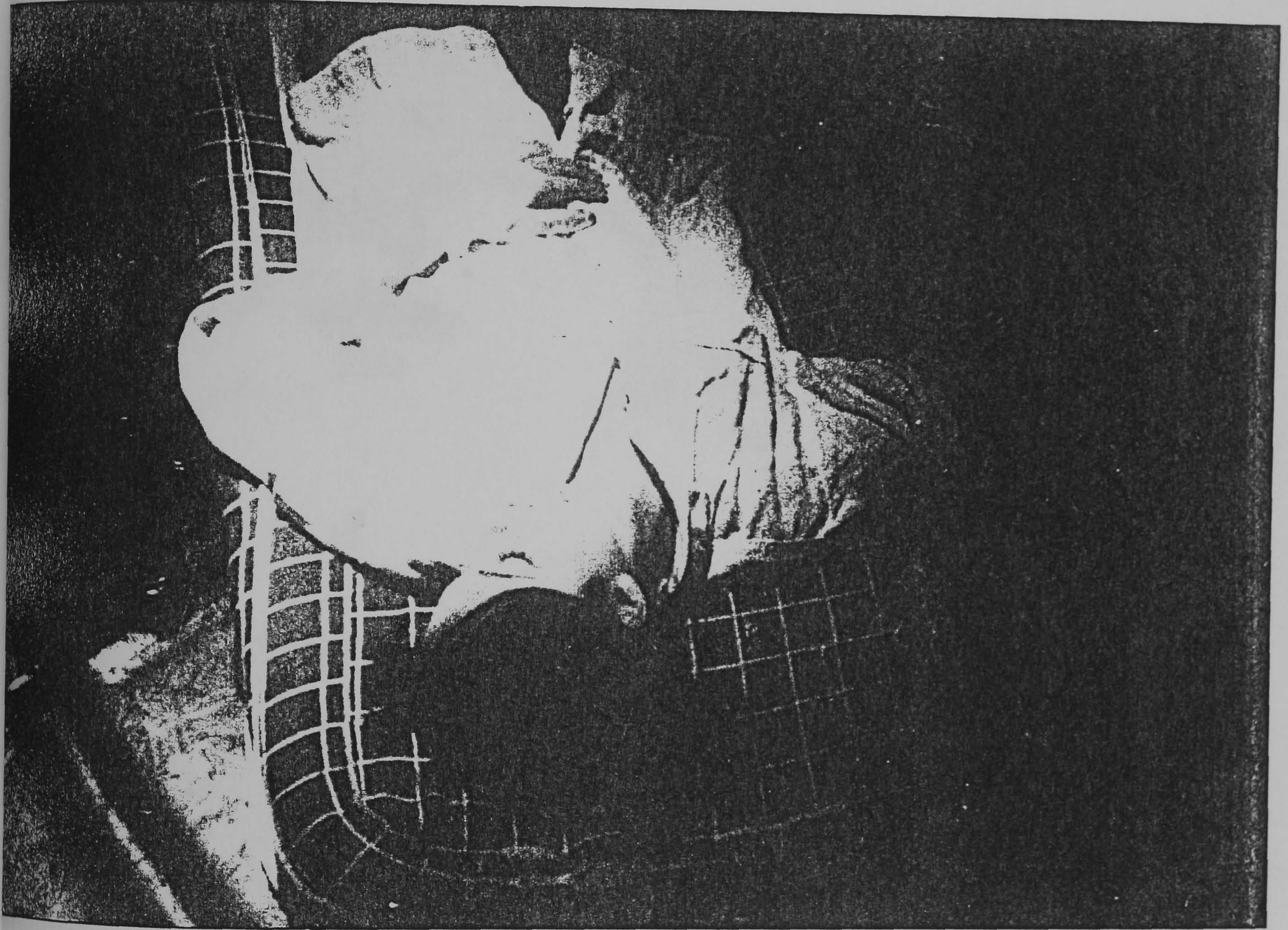




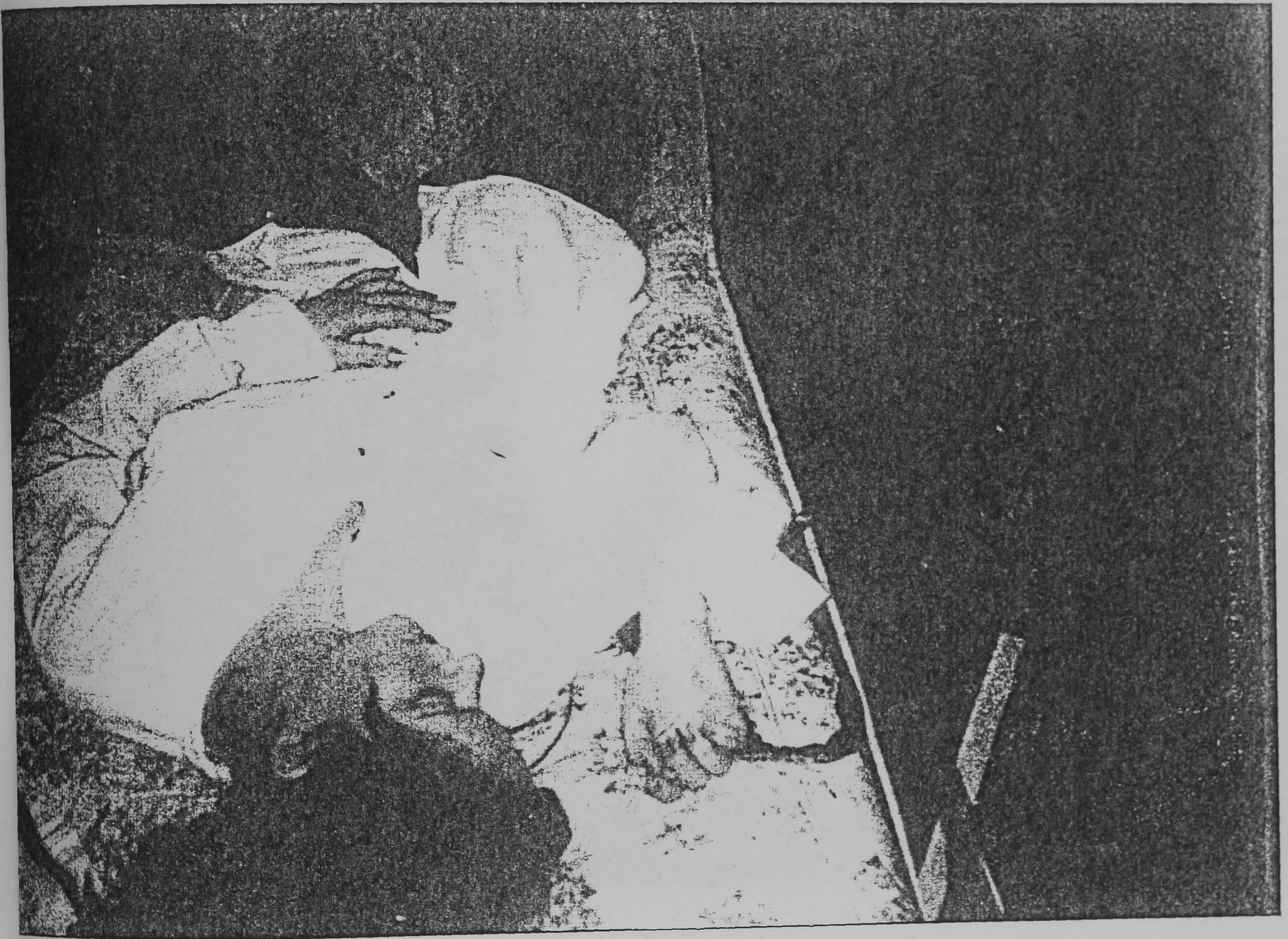








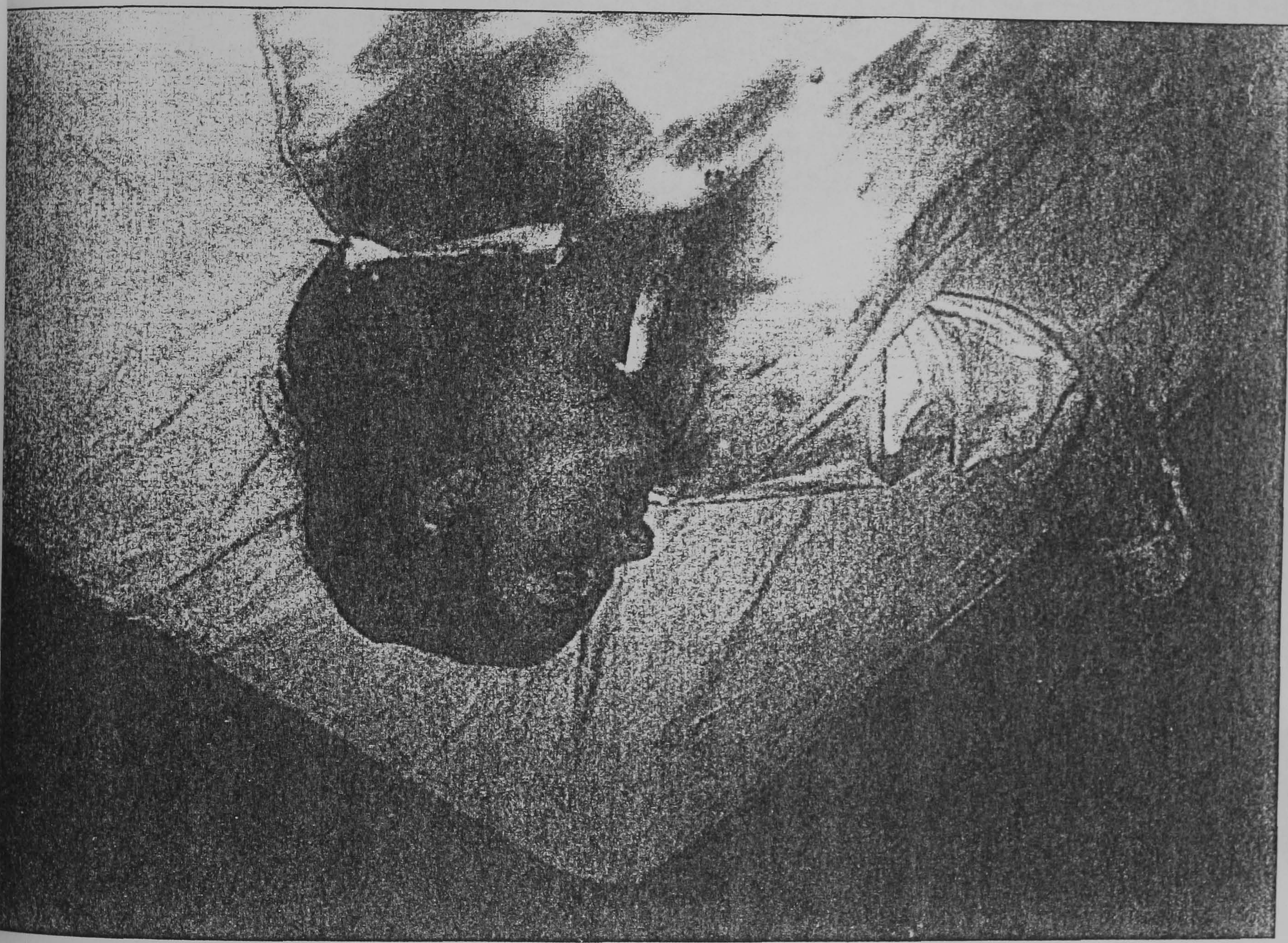












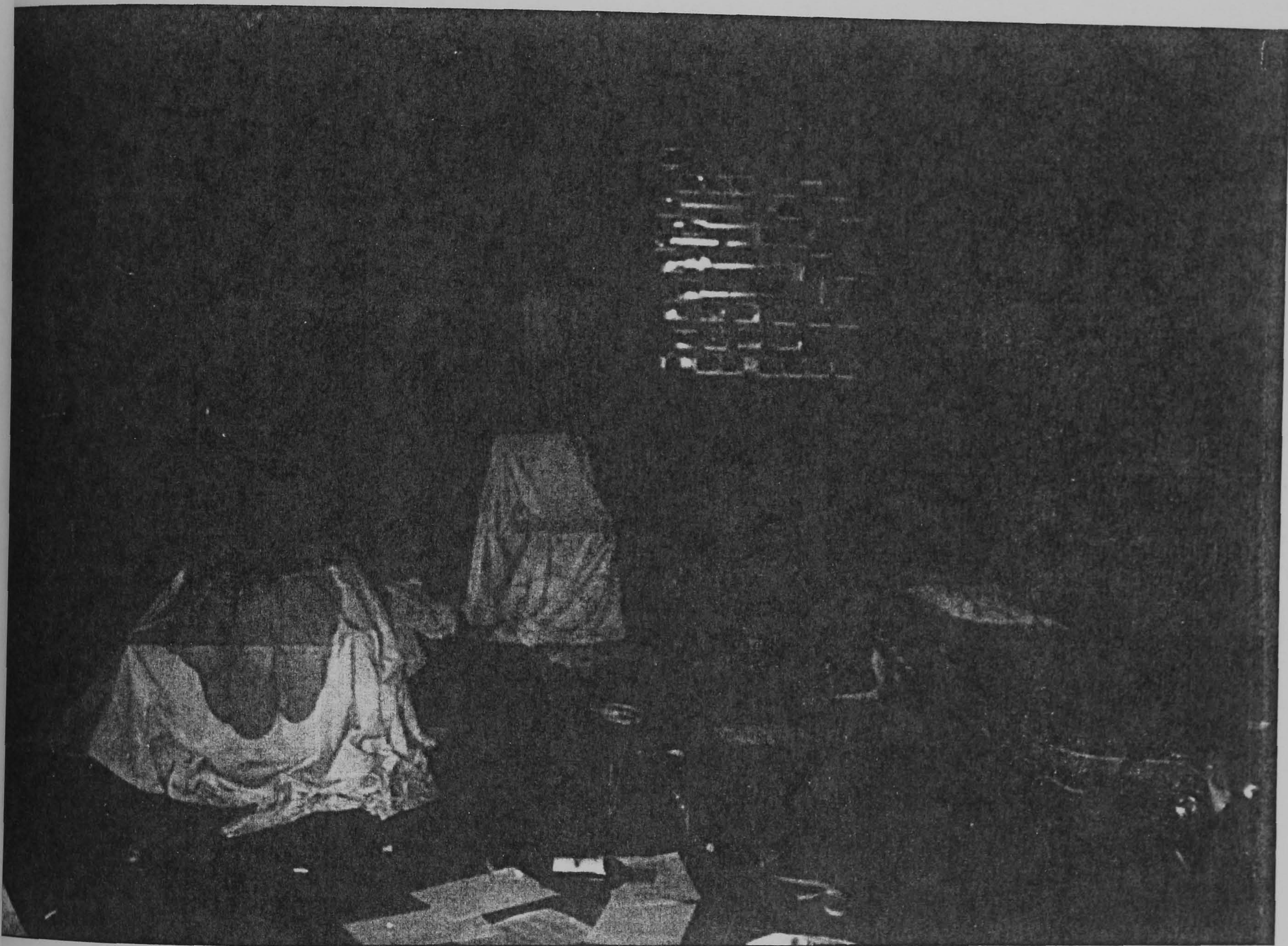














## **Appendix Eight**



## At Last Sight (Liege)

The performers are on-stage, chalking around key objects: a single bed, wooden chairs, some of which are overturned, wine bottles, empty or full, a battered leather suitcase. Upstage, a large wooden blackboard is partly covered with Polaroid photographs depicting previous rehearsals, a torn latex glove, cigarette butts, spent matches. Each object is described in chalked writing, although this is too far away from the audience for words to be legible.

The members of the cast are drinking wine from plastic glasses, and greet certain spectators as they arrive ... some are offered drinks. The atmosphere and *attitude* suggest a preparation for performance, rather than of performance itself.

After some minutes the lights, which until then have illuminated the entire auditorium, are taken down until the audience is in semi-darkness and the on-stage space is bathed in a clearly artificial blue wash. The lights are operated from an on-stage board, as is all amplified sound. A radio and cassette deck sit next to the lighting rig and a microphone on a long lead is plugged into the speaker.

The performers line up, facing the audience, before the women lie down, as though dead. Glenn Robertson changes the lighting state to white and the women rejoin the line. The entire cast begins to speak.

**SS:** I should tell you that I will be speaking in sign language for much of the next hour. I can speak. The signs are just a way of making words visual. I'm Sarah Skelton. I'm twenty years old. A little nervous. A little scared.

The bed is moved downstage and **Liz Hague** and **Sarah Skelton** sit on it.

**Andrew Proudfoot** moves chair centre stage, as if to speak but **Sarah Skelton** signals for him to stay silent.

**Chris Roberts** picks up the microphone and addresses the audience. **Laurent Ruggeri**, speaking without a microphone, translates random sections into French as and when **CR** leaves appropriate silences:

**CR: (mic)** It is here a work of good faith. And it warns you, right from the outset, that I here envisaged no end other than a domestic and private one. Here I in no way considered your interests, nor did I look to my own glory. Such a project lies beyond my powers. I have destined my work to serve as a certain comfort to my parents and friends: having lost me (which, indeed, they soon will) they will find here not a trace of my condition or humours, and thus will cherish more wholeheartedly and vividly the knowledge that they have had of me. Had it been a



matter of seeking the world's favour, I would have adorned myself better, just as I would have presented myself in a more studied manner. I wish to be seen here in all my simplicity, quite natural and ordinary, without effort or artifice: for it is myself that I show. Thus, I am myself the subject of my work: it is not reasonable that you should squander your leisure on a subject so frivolous and vain. Chris Roberts, 3<sup>rd</sup> of March, 1999, Liege.

**GR:** I say these words: sit there and say nothing to me. Not yet. Just listen. There are some things I have wanted to say, although I wonder, perhaps, whether the words I have chosen are the best ones I can choose to speak my thoughts. Whether these words are enough to keep you listening. Sit there, say nothing, and I can imagine you are listening. A listener. A listener to my voice. My voice needs to be listened to tonight. The words I choose to speak need to be heard.

**EH: (mic)** Old paint, on canvas, as it ages, sometimes becomes transparent. When that happens. It is possible, in some pictures. To see the original lines. A portrait shows through a landscape. A tree will show through a woman's dress. Black lines will bleed dark through the faces of saints. This is called. Pentimento. Because the painter is repenting. Changing her mind.

**CR:** His mind.

**EH:** My mind. Perhaps, it would be as well to say, that the old conception, replaced by a later choice, is a way of seeing, and then of seeing again. Of second sight and second chances. Liz Hague. March, 1999, Liege.

**AP:** When I came upon the diary - this diary – my diary. It was lying at the bottom of a rather battered manila cardboard box. Someone, perhaps it had even been myself, had filled it with treasures dating, it seemed, from my own youth: some negatives rolled up in a tight coil; a vial of water; held tightly in a rubber band; a pack of playing cards, red-backed with images of semi-naked women on the front; four lines of text on yellowed card:

**EH: (mic)** But, child of dust, the fragrant flowers,  
The bright blue sky and velvet sod  
Were strange conductors to the bowers  
Thy daring footsteps must have trod



**CR:** A small combination lock with three rows of letters, worn flat and illegible. A petrol cigarette lighter, long-smoothed by smoker's hand, and one or two ambiguous objects, pieces of things, of which the use was not at once apparent. Unsilvered glass, framed as a mirror; a fragment of what looked like a white cotton shirt, smelling faintly of the sea.

**AG:** My first impression was that it was a present someone had brought me from abroad, from Morocco, perhaps, or from Spain. A gift from someone non-existent. The shape, the lettering, the dark limp leather curling upwards at the corners, gave it a foreign look, and it had, I could see, gold edges. I did not want to touch it and told myself that this was because it challenged my memory. I knew why I distrusted it, as I knew that my distrust was born of fear. I looked away and it seemed to me that every object in the room exhaled the diary's enervating power, and spoke its message of disappointment and defeat.

**SR: (mic)** The relics were not exactly dirty nor were they quite clean, they had the patina of age; and as I handled them, for the first time in a long time, or perhaps for the first ever time, a recollection of what each must have meant to me came back, faint as a whispered voice heard through a wall or as a face seen through the window of a passing train, but as perceptible, as known. The children of the past were presenting themselves to me, and as I held them in my hands I knew them all. Only the diary refused to disclose its identity. And how could I know of whom its secrets speak if I could not be sure whose hand had guided the pen that wrote the words? How could I know how to feel if the memories contained in the book were other than my own? Or if any of that which was written, which my eye passed over, had been the product of invention rather than experience?

**GR:** You see me. I am known to some of you. The words I am speaking are not my own. They tell you little. They are nothing more than a series of words. They are words without gender. I have gender. They are words in English ... but you see, they could be words in German, in Spanish, in Finnish, in French.

**EH:** I felt, with a bitter blend of self-pity and self-reproach, that had it not been for the diary, or what the diary stood for, everything would be different. I should not be here, sitting where the curtains were not even drawn to hide the cold rain beating on the windows, or contemplating the accumulation of the past and the duty it imposed on me.



Nor should I be here, telling secrets to strangers. I should be sitting in another room, rainbow-hued, or blue, blue-walled, looking not into the past but into the future, and I should not be sitting alone.

**SS:** (Sarah either signs or speaks the following)  
And now you watch me while I'm dressing, applying make-up. You see me here, in front of you, in public, on display. Am I becoming someone else? Are my lips painted red for you? Is this done for your gaze?

**AG:** The words describe themselves and they describe a situation: I am standing here in front of you and I can speak. Do these words describe or do they deceive? If I dress myself in someone else's clothes, if I take another's name, if I speak in an accent or language other than my own. If I convince you of the fullness of an empty cup. If I cut my throat with an empty hand, if I cry because of some imagined pain?

**EH:** Even when it's different. It always starts like this. With a world not listening to nothing to hear. When, on this night, like any other, in this place, silent, witnessed, watched, we are wakened by dreams too sad for sleep.

The radio is tuned into a local station.

**AP:** The memory begins in a room. A room made only partly visible through dimmed stage lighting. A room of the imagination. A room made of words and of objects and of light.

**SR:** It's hours before that. Leaning in the half-light of a hallway, against a whitewashed wall, thumbing through the pages of a borrowed book, paperback or hardback, fact or fiction, it doesn't matter ... it's just a book. Listening to things half-heard and not quite yet remembered.

What does the man do? Glenn?

**EH:** He enters through an upstage door. He washes in the water. She comes to him and sits and watches. She tells him that the magic of new love, is his ignorance that it can ever end. What does he see?

**SR:** He sees her. She's out at sea, he's telling her more than he ever dreamed he'd dare.



CR: He abandons all sense. He gives himself over to the moment, loving her completeness and the way her face is captured in a shaft of light and the way she sits, erect and unashamed and self-composed. He wants to look at her forever; to hold this image of her here with him. He wants to listen to her speak until all other sounds recede; he wants to use words he has never used before, to speak them fresh into her own ears and to her lips. He wants to touch her. He wants to lie down beside her in a hotel room where all are seen as strangers. He wants his words to travel into her. He wants her to see the way he sees her.

SS: These are the facts. The details. All of the words have been spoken before. And this: this is the story. She crosses towards him.

CR: What's she wearing?

SS: You would like to see her? She's wearing blue jeans and a light in colour shirt. She's barefoot and her hair is wet from either the sea or rain. She has the eyes of the woman on the Nine of Hearts. She lies beside him on the bed and tells him of her dreams.

No. I remember myself as younger. In a different room ...

CR: (mic) This is a Fassbinder movie. It's called 'The Merchant of Four Seasons'. (To a member of the audience) Excuse me, what's your name? (Speaking the spectator's name) ... is Hans and, excuse me what's your name? (Name) ... is Elke. Hans stays out late every night and he comes home and he beats Elke. She uses her victim status to gain sympathy from the audience. From us. And whilst Hans is in hospital, she has an affair with another man ..... What's your name? (Name) ... is Gunther. She has an affair with Gunther.

Look, I feel I ought to apologise. I'm no actor. I'm here because of who I am, not what I can do. Where I feel sadness maybe you could act tears. To be honest I'm scared and a little drunk. What with the lights and the wine and with you watching me. I had hoped that this would be the type of performance where I could pretend that you weren't there. But every time I look up I see you.

So, for my absence of acted tears, I'm very, very sorry.

SS: Thank you.



- AP:** He stops her. He asks her to remember Montpellier. The bed and no breakfast ... and the flat in Scotland. Hotel rooms with fading once blue paper on the walls. There was paper ... blue ...
- SR:** The man lights a cigarette, striking his match against the wall and shielding the flame with his hand. He moves closer to the woman, whispers, touches her face. She walks towards him. She's remembering the feelings she thought she'd forgotten. She's reeling. She tells him as much truth as she knows. She's wearing the dress from Montpellier and the sky outside is dark. He's too close. She can't breathe. You're too close Andrew. She feels herself fall. He catches her ... he catches her before she falls. She falls.
- AS: (mic)** Betrayal. Betrayal. Betrayal.
- SR:** She says this over and over, like a mantra. And Andrew tries to stop her. He takes her by the arm: she stops, goes perfectly still, and says: 'take ... your ... hand ... off ... me.' And the camera cuts and we see Liz peddling home from college on her bicycle, and the camera sort of wobbles and we're back in Sarah's memory ... in my memory. And I'm lying in a bed, I'm naked in a hotel bed. And I turn to Andrew and I ask: 'how old will I be? How old will I be before you love me?'
- EH:** This is a David Lynch film. That's all it is. It's called 'No Silence'. Sarah ... Juliette Lewis, and Andrew, Nicolas Cage, are standing over the body of her dead brother, Chris ... Sean Penn, he's still holding the knife he used to kill him with. And the sheriff, Glenn, is on his way .... but he's taking too long, he's just too slow, and Sarah, the one-armed woman, is just around here. And Anke, Anke isn't in this bit, and Sarah sings, the words just coming out, and she sings: et ce sont les mots, écrits au bureau pour être parlés plus tard, dans un autre pays, dans un autre voix. Et ces mots sont écrits en Anglais. et ces mots sont Choisis, sélectionnés. Les Formes noirs sur l'écran pour les yeux à suivre et les bouches à parler. Je mets les mots dans les bouches des autres. Je fabrique des de la vérité. Ce spectacle pourrait être un hymne à la différence, une cartographie des frontières qu'aucun état ne pourra abolir; car l'autre quel qu'il soit, ne sera jamais tout à fait notre semblable. À défaut d'éveiller les consciences et de changer le monde, nous livrons notre émotion. Ceci étant notre dernier don intéressé au monde. Ne fumes pas depuis toujours irréremédiablement



etranger parmi les autres, nous qui jusqu'au fond du souvenir demeurons étranger a nous-memes? She falls.

The men sit on the bed and assume a collectively pornographic pose, as a Polaroid photograph is taken of them.

SR: Chris.  
CR: Yes.  
SR: Will you make love to me?  
CR: Yes.  
SR: When will you make love to me?  
CR: When I've finished my cigarette.  
SR: How will you make love to me?  
CR: Gently.  
SR: How gently?  
CR: I've already started.

EH: I feel I should apologise.  
We're not actors. We find it difficult to speak words learned, as well as words which are our own. There are things going on within the group that make interaction on-stage difficult. So if we stumble or make mistakes, please try to find a way to forgive us.

A cassette tape is played: two American voices, male and female, speaking of the future. The women return to the stage area

SR: She says: nothing you could ever say could hurt me. And I won't come after you, not now, not ever. And she says: this is who I am. And this is who I am. And lying to me won't alter the truth. And lying to others won't alter the truth. And I used to love you. And every moment that we spent together in this place was wrong. And I should go down to the water and I should wash myself clean of you. And there are things I've seen and done that you could never know about or even imagine or draw a picture of inside your mind. And these are my hands. And I loved you more than you loved me. And I loved you more, so much more, than you loved me. And don't think I'm coming to find you. And you're making me tired. Just stop it with these games, alright?

SS: (mic) And she started to cry ... and lean into you. You took the glass from her hand and put it on the table. She cried, full of her pain and her loneliness. And you put your arm around her and moved her so that she was facing you, her cheek against your chest and your arms around her, and she kicked off her shoes and curled her legs up on the too-small couch and you held her. Until after a while



she said you were the only one in the world who cared for her.

**AG:** Elle a crié. Plein de sa douleur et sa solitude, vous avez s'embrace. En la tournant en face de vous. sa joue sur sa poitrine. Et vos bras autour de lui.

**SS: (mic)** You said that it was hard to call her by her name and she said that then you should call her something else.

**EH:** Call me Arabella. I will be Arabella and you can be ...  
**LR:** Paris.

**SS: (mic)** Her mascara was smeared by her tears.

**GR:** Hi, Arabella. When did you arrive in this hotel room?

**EH:** Well, I just got off a train. I came all the way from nowhere to be with you.

**GR:** Nice to meet you, Arabella.

**EH:** I am pleased to meet you, Paris. I hope you are not already taken. I hope you are not already in love with someone else. With somebody else. With some other woman.

**GR:** Hell, I just have never met the right girl.

**EH:** Listen, what have you got that shirt on for? It's too hot in here. In this room with the rain on the outside of the glass. You have no need for this shirt. All these buttons. What do you need them for?

**SS: (mic)** She told you that your skin was smooth, and the fear inside you came right up to your neck. You mumbled something, started to speak.

**EH:** Hush now, Paris. You hear?

**SS: (mic)** She took you by the hand and led you over to the bed. You went to where she took you. Did what she did.

**EH:** You should look at me. You should look at me, and speak my name.

**LR:** Arabella. Arabella.

**SS: (mic)** And you watched her. As she undressed in the rented room.

**EH:** There is nothing to worry about, Paris. The door's locked. There's nothing to worry about.

**GR:** Yes, Arabella. I understand.

**SS: (mic)** She said she wanted to know everything about you. And she asked you ...

**EH:** What do you believe in? How do you love?

**SS: (mic)** And you answered her.

A cassette tape is played: two female Japanese voices whispering

**Cast to AP:** It's raining and the sky is black. It's 2 a.m. it's in a room, some hotel room beside the sea. You're looking in a mirror and you can see him lying on the bed. He's naked.



He's dressed. He's dressed. he says something to you which you only half-hear. He crosses to the window, lights two cigarettes, takes one to you. He kisses you. He tries to kiss you and you turn away. It's warm. The sun's shining. He takes off his jacket, then his shirt. It's raining. 2 a.m., a hotel room. It's earlier, downstairs. It's 1 a.m. it's midnight. It's earlier and you're breaking things, you're breaking things while other people watch. It's 2 a.m. You go outside. It's raining as if the world is upside down and now the sea is sky. It's 2 a.m.

**AG:** Je porte le jean blues et une chemise clarte en couleur. Je suis nu-pieds. Je t'embrace. Je decris notre avenir. Je te montre les cicaturices sur mon corps, je mets tes mains sur ma paitrine. Je faits des promets. Je ne veux que ce que tu veut me donner. Je te demande a aublier mon passe.

Another cassette tape is played: American voices, from the film *Heat*. Men and women at a dinner party. The on-stage lights are dimmed slightly. All embrace except **CR** and **LR**.

**CR:** This is another Rainer Werner Fassbinder film. It's from 1962. It's called 'Too Naughty to Say No'. Anna plays Helga, she's recently married to Franz, who has gone into town to buy cigarettes, leaving her alone, semi-naked and semi-aroused, in a forest. Two brothers, identical twins, Stefan, played by Andrew, and Heinrich, played by me, come down from their house in the Bavarian hills and see Helga lying there. They approach her carefully, scared that she might flee, but instead she moves to a clearing and lies down, but there's gorse. Thorns are digging into her. Her body is torn, but the pain becomes part of the pleasure. Heinrich, the younger twin by four minutes, starts thrusting into her, while the older brother watches on. Fassbinder and his estate have denied all knowledge of the film, but for any of you who know his work, it's undeniably his: the lighting, the *mise en scene*, the camera-work ... it's all there.

**SR:** She says nothing you could ever say could hurt me, and I won't come after you, not now, not ever. She says, this is who I am, and this is who I am. And lying to me won't alter the truth and I used to love you and every moment we spent together in this place was wrong and I should go down to the water and I should wash myself clean of you and there are things I've seen that you could never know about or even imagine or draw a picture of inside your mind. And these are my hands. These are my hands. And I loved you more than you loved me and I



loved you more, much more, than you loved me and I loved you. And don't go confusing love with lust. And. And you're making me tired. Just stop it with these games, alright.

**EH: (mic)** In the bed with her it is dark. And she says ...

**AG:** Let me tell you something. I have to spoil things now. I have to dress and leave.

**AP:** No. Just stay.

**AG:** But I have to go. It's risky enough already. I don't want to make things worse.

**AP:** Alright.

**AG:** Please. Don't hate me.

**AP:** I don't hate you, it's just that I hate to see you leave.

**AG:** I know, I hate it too.

**EH:** There, in the darkness of the room, she rises from the bed. He can hear the rustling of fabric as she begins to dress, to put on her clothes. The sound is difficult for him to take.

**AG dresses in AP's jacket, wets her hair and ties it back.**

**AP:** Arabella ...

**AG:** Yes?

**AP:** Let's go away.

**AG:** What? What's that?

**AP:** We'll go away. It's the only thing we can do. Look, I know it's wrong. It's wrong. It's all wrong.

**AG:** What do you want me to do?

**AP:** Pack some things. Write a note. Meet me at the station, at the harbour, at the airport, at the side of the road. Meet me in the lobby, in the car park. Wait for me in the corridor, in the dark, by the elevator. On page 22. Wait for me and I'll find you.

**EH:** He tries to count the floorboards, imagining them as minutes till she leaves.

**LR:** Arabella.

**AG is placed on the bed by the men. She is positioned: her hair is fanned out on the pillow. A Polaroid photograph is taken of the men as they manipulate Anna's body.**

**SS: (mic)** Tonight, let us discuss the physiology of the female orgasm. Stage One is called 'Excitement'. Within ten to fifteen seconds after erotic stimulation the vaginal lining is lubricated with fluid. Nipples erect, the breasts begin to



swell. Some women develop a measles-like rash or 'sex flush' across their bodies.

Stage Two is called 'Plateau'. The tissue surrounding the outer part of the vagina now balloons out to form a cavity. The uterus enlarges and the outer third of the vagina now reduces its diameter - adjusts to circumstances one might say - in order to grip the penis tighter. The labia minora turn pink or bright red. When a woman develops sex skin reaction she is almost certain to go to orgasm.

Stage Three is called 'Orgasm'. The typical orgasm lasts only ten to fifteen seconds, if that long. Three to five contractions is a usual orgasm, fifteen is the most.

Thank you.

**SR:** And the room is as dark now as the sky beyond the glass. And Arabella is as dark now as the night beyond the glass. And her shape is consumed by the shape of the room. And the sound of her breath ... is the sound of the rain.

**AG:** Good evening, my name's Anna. I speak a little French. I've been lying on this bed for some time now, and in case you're concerned, I'm very happy. Really, I am. I have my lover here. I'm going to sing a song in a minute ... well, not sing it really. I'm going to move my lips to the words ... I wouldn't want any of you to think I was trying to fool you. Thank you.

**AG** 'sings' to Bessie Smith's recording of *You've Got Me Crying Again* as **AP** and **GR** clear the set.

**CR:** This is another Fassbinder film ... it's called 'The Merchant of Four Seasons'. Liz plays a sportswriter, who's sitting at a typewriter, typing. It's .... Sarah plays ... Sarah plays Veronica. She's at a party ... it's her party. She's surrounded by friends and the camera sort of pans back as we see them all. They're milling around her. She's singing: she's singing ... 'Memories are Made of This'. She's singing and her friends ... they're laughing and smiling and .... A sportswriter, Veronica, played by Sarah. Veronica, played by Anna, is singing. She's at a party, it's her own party and she's singing *Memories are Made of This*. Anna. Well she's singing. The camera pans around. All of her friends are milling around her.

The women turn to look at **CR**. They whisper as they walk past him. The lights shift back to blue.



**CR:** Veronica's singing. She's singing, and her lover walks in. He's got a long overcoat on and he's smiling. He's smiling at Veronica. Just watching her. Watching everything she does.

The lights are taken down slowly to blackout.



***At Last Sight***  
(Chester)

**Laurent Ruggeri**  
**Anke Sauthof**  
**Sarah Skelton**  
**Sarah Robertson**  
**Glenn Robertson**  
**Liz Hague**  
**Andrew Proudfoot**  
**Chris Roberts**

A French language tape plays. The cast members are on-stage. There are objects: a single bed, wooden chairs, some of which are overturned, wine bottles, empty or full, a battered leather suitcase. Upstage, a large wooden blackboard is partly covered with Polaroid photographs depicting previous rehearsals, a torn latex glove, cigarette butts, spent matches. Each object is described in chalked writing, although this is too far from the audience for words to be legible.

The members of the cast are drinking wine from plastic glasses, and greet certain spectators as they arrive ... some are offered drinks. The atmosphere is of a preparation for performance, rather than of performance itself. The performers are preparing the space as much as themselves.

**SS** leaves the space. After some minutes the lights, which until then have illuminated the entire auditorium, are taken down until the audience is in semi-darkness and the on-stage space is bathed in a clearly artificial blue wash. The lights are operated from an on-stage board, as is all amplified sound. A radio and cassette deck sit next to the lighting rig and a microphone on a long lead is plugged into the speaker. Japanese voices emerge from the cassette deck.

**SS** re-emerges. She is wet through.

**SS:** Impotence. Sterility. Substitution. Denial. The steady beat of the sleeping heart. Loneliness. Doubt. Belief. Truth. The bliss of the body deluding the heart. Self-consumption. Solitude. Silence. Letters. Dust. The tear that falls. (Takes Polaroid photograph of audience. Looks at the picture and lies down).

**CR:** It's that Fassbinder movie. Glenn, look. 'Merchant of Four Seasons'. This is Franz and this is Elke. Franz stays out late. Mistreats her. And Elke uses this to gain sympathy from us. Whilst Franz is in hospital she has an affair with another man ... Gunther.

(On microphone, with **LR** offering occasional translations into French) It is here a work of good faith. And it warns you, right from the outset, that I here envisaged no end



other than a domestic and private one. Here I in no way considered your interests, nor did I look to my own glory. Such a project lies beyond my powers. I have destined my work to serve as a certain comfort to my parents and friends: having lost me (which, indeed, they soon will) they will find here not a trace of my condition or humours, and thus will cherish more wholeheartedly and vividly the knowledge that they have had of me. Had it been a matter of seeking the world's favour, I would have adorned myself better, just as I would have presented myself in a more studied manner. I wish to be seen here in all my simplicity, quite natural and ordinary, without effort or artifice: for it is myself that I show. Thus, I am myself the subject of my work: it is not reasonable that you should squander your leisure on a subject so frivolous and vain. Chris Roberts, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1999, Chester.

**AP:** Most performance is disguised autobiography. This autobiography is a disguised performance. However adroitly I attempt to disguise my intentions, I can be sure there are enough unintentional revelations to betray me.

**GR:** I say these words: sit there and say nothing to me. Not yet. Just listen. There are some things I have wanted to say, although I wonder, perhaps, whether the words I have chosen are the best ones I can choose to speak my thoughts. Whether these words are enough to keep you listening. Sit there, say nothing, and I can imagine you are listening. A listener. A listener to my voice. My voice needs to be listened to tonight. The words I choose to speak need to be heard. (LR translates into French the sections he chooses ... from this point LR and AS repeat words in French and German as and when they see fit).

I remember lying on your bed. I said you were beautiful and you smiled. I told you you were beautiful and you smiled. Smile. You're beautiful, smile. The room smells of our bodies and I know I'll always love you. I know I'll always remember this. Remember loving you. Or love remembering you. Or remember to remember that I'll always love you. I love you. Are my lips lying to you? Could this mouth ever lie to yours?

And I wonder if that's enough to keep you listening tonight?

**SR:** It's my voice that needs an audience tonight. It's my voice that needs to be listened to.



**EH:** What would you like me to do next? Would you like me to improvise something? Would you like to see panic? Don't you think that I am in a state of panic now? Would you like to see tears? I mean, I can't cry just like that. Put me in a play with characters and I could perhaps imagine ... but not just like that. You would like to see drowning? What is it to drown? The first thing is the loss of voice. Unable to speak I'm left with everything to say. With no means of making myself heard I know at last the power and the impotence of words. The first thing is the loss of breath. Like waking with my own hands upon my throat. Like being choked on dust. The first thing is the loss of strength. Like being carried by a crowd. Like drunkenness. Like hypnosis. Without control, not even of thought, not even of hope. The last thing is the loss of hope.

Is that enough?

**SR:** Will you make love to me?

**CR:** Yes.

**SR:** When will you make love to me?

**CR:** When I've finished my cigarette.

**SR:** How will you make love to me?

**CR:** Gently.

**SR:** How gently?

**CR:** I've already started.

**SS:** (Sarah either signs or speaks the following)

And now you watch me while I'm dressing, applying make-up. You see me here, in front of you, in public, on display. Am I becoming someone else? Are my lips painted red for you? Is this done for your gaze?

The words describe themselves and they describe a situation: I am standing here in front of you and I can speak. Do these words describe or do they deceive? If I dress myself in someone else's clothes, if I take another's name, if I speak in an accent or language other than my own. If I convince you of the fullness of an empty cup. If I cut my throat with an empty hand, if I cry because of some imagined pain?

**LH:** I think I should apologise. We're not actors. We find it difficult to speak words learned, as well as words which are in fact our own. It's hard for us. There are things going on within the group that make it awkward. If we stumble, please try to find a way to forgive us.



**CR:** I feel I should apologise. I'm no actor. I'm here because of who I am, not what I can do. Where there's sadness perhaps you could act tears. Who knows. To be honest, I'm a little bit scared and a little drunk. What with the wine and the lights. I had hoped that this would be the type of performance where I could pretend the audience wasn't here, but every time I look up I see you. So, for my absence of acted tears, I'm very, very sorry.

**EH:** Even when it's different. It always starts like this. With a world not listening to nothing to hear. When, on this night, like any other, in this place, silent, witnessed, watched, we are wakened by dreams too sad for sleep.

**CR:** He abandons all sense. He gives himself over to the moment, loving her completeness and the way her face is captured in a shaft of light and the way she sits, erect and unashamed and self-composed. He wants to look at her forever; to hold this image of her here with him. He wants to listen to her speak until all other sounds recede; he wants to use words he has never used before, to speak them fresh into her own ears and to her lips. He wants to touch her. He wants to lie down beside her in a hotel room where all are seen as strangers. He wants his words to travel into her. He wants her to see the way he sees her.

**SS:** These are the facts. The details. All of the words have been spoken before. And this: this is the story. She crosses towards him.

**CR:** What's she wearing?

**SS:** You would like to see her? She's wearing blue jeans and a light in colour shirt. She's barefoot and her hair is wet from either the sea or rain. She has the eyes of the woman on the Nine of Hearts. She lies beside him on the bed and tells him of her dreams.

No. I remember myself as younger. In a different room ...

**AP:** The memory begins in a room. A room made only partly visible through dimmed stage-lighting. A room of the imagination. A room made of words and of objects and of light.

When I came upon the diary - this diary - my diary. It was lying at the bottom of a rather battered manila cardboard box. Someone, perhaps it had even been myself, had filled it with treasures dating, it seemed, from my own



youth. Some negatives rolled up in a tight coil; a vial of water; held tightly in a rubber band; a pack of playing cards, red-backed with images of semi-naked women on the front. Four lines of text on yellowed card:

**EH:** But, child of dust, the fragrant flowers,  
The bright blue sky and velvet sod  
Were strange conductors to the bowers  
Thy daring footsteps must have trod

**AP:** He stops her. He asks her to remember Montpellier. The bed and no breakfast ... and the flat in Scotland. Hotel rooms with fading once blue paper on the walls. There was paper ... blue ...

**SR:** The man lights a cigarette, striking his match against the wall and shielding the flame with his hand. He moves closer to the woman, whispers, touches her face. She walks towards him. She's remembering the feelings she thought she'd forgotten. She's reeling. She tells him as much truth as she knows. She's wearing the dress from Montpellier and the sky outside is dark. He's too close. She can't breathe. You're too close Andrew. She feels herself fall. He catches her ... he catches her before she falls. She falls.

And then the camera cuts and you can see Liz, peddling home from college on her bicycle. The camera goes in close on the spinning of the wheel and I say to Andrew: 'How old will you be before I love you?'

**AS:** Betrayal. Betrayal. Betrayal.

**SR:** She says this over and over, like a mantra. And Andrew tries to stop her. He takes her by the arm: she stops, goes perfectly still, and says: 'take ... your ... hand ... off ... me.' And the camera cuts back and we see Liz peddling home again from college on her bicycle, and the camera sort of wobbles and we're back in Sarah's memory ... in my memory. And I'm lying in a bed, I'm naked in a hotel bed. And I turn to Andrew and I ask: 'How old will you be? How old will you be before I love you?'

**EH:** This is a Michael Winner film. That's all it is. It's called 'No Silence'. Sarah ... Juliette Lewis, and Andrew, Nicolas Cage, are standing over the body of her dead brother, Chris ... Sean Penn, he's still holding the knife he used to kill him. And the sheriff, Glenn, is on his way .... but he's taking too long, he's just too slow, and Sarah, the one-



armed woman, is just around here. And Anke, Anke isn't in this bit, and Sarah sings, the words just coming out, and she sings: et ce sont les mots, écrits au bureau pour être parlés plus tard, dans un autre pays, dans un autre pays. Et ces mots sont écrits en Anglais. et ces mots sont Choisis, sélectionnés. Les Formes noires sur l'écran pour les yeux à suivre et les bouches à parler. Je mets les mots dans les bouches des autres. Je fabrique des de la vérité. Ce spectacle pourrait être un hymne à la différence, une cartographie des frontières qu'aucun état ne pourra abolir; car l'autre quel qu'il soit, ne sera jamais tout à fait notre semblable. À défaut d'éveiller les consciences et de changer le monde, nous livrons notre émotion. Ceci étant notre dernier don intéressé au monde. Ne fumes pas depuis toujours irremédiablement étranger parmi les autres, nous qui jusqu'au fond du souvenir demeurons étranger à nous-mêmes? She falls.

The men sit on the bed and assume a collectively pornographic pose as a Polaroid photograph is taken of them.

- SS: Drink?  
AP: Yes.  
SS: Come and get it then.  
AP: I'll come and get the glass, and I'll come and get you.  
SS: So, what's next?  
AP: Information, you mean?  
SS: Yes.  
AP: Well, fire a question. Nothing too loaded.  
SS: Later maybe.  
AP: How fast do you fall?  
SS: Too fast. Take me to bed, I'm tired of all this talk.  
AP: Are you a romantic?  
SS: Romantic enough. Kiss me.  
AP: Not in front of all these people.
- SS: Tonight, let us discuss the physiology of the female orgasm.

Stage One is called 'Excitement'. Within ten to fifteen seconds after erotic stimulation the vaginal lining is lubricated with fluid. Nipples erect, the breasts begin to swell. Some women develop a measles-like rash or 'sex flush' across their bodies.

Stage Two is called 'Plateau'. The tissue surrounding the outer part of the vagina now balloons out to form a cavity. The uterus enlarges and the outer third of the vagina now reduces its diameter - adjusts to circumstances one might say - in order to grip the penis tighter. The labia minora



turn pink or bright red. When a woman develops sex skin reaction she is almost certain to go to orgasm.

Stage Three is called 'Orgasm'. The typical orgasm lasts only ten to fifteen seconds, if that long. Three to five contractions is a usual orgasm, fifteen is the most.

Thank you.

An audio-tape is played: two American voices, male and female, speaking of the future. The women return to the stage area

**SR:** She says: nothing you could ever say could hurt me. And I won't come after you, not now, not ever. And she says: this is who I am. And this is who I am. And lying to me won't alter the truth. And lying to others won't alter the truth. And I used to love you. And every moment that we spent together in this place was wrong. And I should go down to the water and I should wash myself clean of you. And there are things I've seen and done that you could never know about or even imagine or draw a picture of inside your mind. And these are my hands. And I loved you more than you loved me. And I loved you more, so much more, than you loved me. And don't think I'm coming to find you. And you're making me tired. Just stop it with these games, alright?

**SS:** And she started to cry ... and lean into you. You took the glass from her hand and put it on the table. She cried. Full of her pain and her loneliness, and you put your arm around her and moved her so that she was facing you, her cheek against your chest and your arms around her, and she kicked off her shoes and curled her legs up on the too-small couch and you held her. Until after a while she said you were the only one in the world who cared for her.

**AS:** Elle a crié. Plein de sa douleur et sa solitude, vous avez s'embrace. En la tournant en face de vous. sa joue sur sa poitrine. Et vos bras autour de lui.

**SS:** You said that it was hard to call her by her name and she said that then you should call her something else.

**EH:** Call me Arabella. I will be Arabella and you can be ...

**LR:** Paris.

**SS:** Her mascara was smeared by her tears.

**GR:** Hi, Arabella. When did you arrive in this hotel room?

**EH:** Well, I just got off a train. I came all the way from nowhere to be with you.



GR: Nice to meet you, Arabella.  
 EH: I am pleased to meet you, Paris. I hope you are not already taken. I hope you are not already in love with someone else. With somebody else. With some other woman.

GR: Hell, I just have never met the right girl.  
 EH: Listen, what have you got that shirt on for? It's too hot in here. In this room with the rain on the outside of the glass. You have no need for this shirt. All these buttons. What do you need them for?

SS: She told you that your skin was smooth, and the fear inside you came right up to your neck. You mumbled something, started to speak.

EH: Hush now, Paris. You hear?

SS: She took you by the hand and led you over to the bed. You went to where she took you. Did what she did.

EH: You should look at me. You should look at me, and speak my name.

LR: Arabella. Arabella.  
 SS: And you watched her. As she undressed in the rented room.

EH: There is nothing to worry about, Paris. The door's locked. There's nothing to worry about.

GR: Yes, Arabella. I understand.  
 SS: She said she wanted to know everything about you. And she asked you ...

EH: What do you believe in? How do you love?  
 SS: And you answered her.

CR: This is another Rainer Werner Fassbinder film. It's from 1962. It's called 'Too Naughty to Say No'. Anna plays Helga, she's recently married to Franz, who has gone into town to buy cigarettes, leaving her alone, semi-naked and semi-aroused, in a forest. Two brothers, identical twins, Stefan, played by Andrew, and Heinrich, played by me, come down from their house in the Bavarian hills and see Helga lying there. They approach her carefully, scared that she might flee, but instead she moves to a clearing and lies down, but there's gorse. Thorns. They're digging into her. Her body is torn, but the pain becomes part of the pleasure. Heinrich, the younger twin by four minutes, starts thrusting into her, while the older brother watches on. Fassbinder and his estate have denied all knowledge of the film, but for any of you who know his work, it's undeniably his: the lighting, the *mise en scene*, the camera-work .... it's all there.

An audio-tape is played: two female Japanese voices whispering



AS: It's raining and the sky is black. It's 2 a.m. it's in a room, some hotel room beside the sea. You're looking in a mirror and you can see him laying on the bed. He's naked. He's dressed. He's dressed. he says something to you which you only half-hear. He crosses to the window, lights two cigarettes, takes one to you. He kisses you. He tries to kiss you and you turn away. It's warm. The sun's shining. He takes off his jacket, then his shirt. It's raining. 2 a.m., a hotel room. it's earlier, downstairs. It's 1 a.m. it's midnight. It's earlier and you're breaking things, you're breaking things while other people watch. It's 2 a.m. You go outside. It's raining as if the world is upside down and now the sea is sky. It's 2 a.m.

EH: In the bed with her it is dark. And she says ...

SR: Let me tell you something. I have to spoil things now. I have to dress and leave.

AP: No. Just stay.

SR: But I have to go. It's risky enough already. I don't want to make things worse.

AP: Alright.

SR: Please. Don't hate me.

AP: I don't hate you, it's just that I hate to see you leave.

SR: I know, I hate it too.

AP: Everything's been said.

SR: What would you write on walls if your blood were ink?

AP: Just a list of words.

GR: My problem with women is that I have no problem with women. She said to me once, you know, there's less to you than meets the eye, and the problem with our relationship is that we're both in love with the same man. She didn't mean it. How could she mean what she says and still say she loves me? I understand women. There's no mystery there.

EH: Old paint. On canvas. As it ages. Sometimes becomes transparent. When that happens. It is possible, in some pictures. To see the original lines. A portrait shows through a landscape. A tree will show through a woman's dress. Black lines will bleed dark through the faces of saints. This is called. Pentimento. Because the painter is repenting. Changing her mind.

CR: His mind.

EH: My mind. Perhaps, it would be as well to say, that the old conception, replaced by a later choice, is a way of seeing,



and then of seeing again. Of second sight and second chances. Liz Hague. May, 1999, Chester.

**AP:** She was like a tattoo, covering my life from start to finish. Her lids felt heavy on her eyes. The line of her body no different. Her smile exactly as it was. She held my gaze, and from that moment on I knew that nothing else mattered.

My name's Andrew Proudfoot. I'm in this show. I'm alone at the moment and I'm looking for somebody, for someone. This show finishes in not too long. I'm going for a drink afterwards. If any of you fancy a chat, or a drink ... My name's Andrew Proudfoot. Thanks very much for listening.

**SR:** Good evening, my name's Anna. I speak a little French. I've been lying on this bed for some time now, and in case you're concerned, I'm very happy. Really, I am. I have my lover here. I'm going to sing a song in a minute ... well, not sing it really. I'm going to move my lips to the words ... I wouldn't want any of you to think I was trying to fool you. Thankyou.

**SR** 'sings' to Bessie Smith's recording of *You've Got Me Crying Again* as **AP** and **GR** clear the set.

**CR:** This is another Fassbinder film ... it's called 'The Merchant of Four Seasons'. Liz plays a sportswriter, who's sitting at a type writer, typing. It's .... Sarah plays ... Sarah plays Veronica. She's at a party ... it's her party. She's surrounded by friends and the camera sort of pans back as we see them all. They're milling around her. She's singing: she's singing ... 'Memories are Made of This'. She's singing and her friends ... they're laughing and smiling and .... A sportswriter, Veronica, played by Sarah. Veronica, played by Anna, is singing. She's at a party, it's her own party and she's singing *Memories are Made of This*. Anna. Well she's singing. The camera pans around. All of her friends are milling around her.

The women turn to look at **CR**. They whisper as they walk past him. The lights fade out to black.

**CR:** Veronica's singing. She's singing, and her lover walks in. He's got a long overcoat on and he's smiling. He's smiling at Veronica. Just watching her. Watching everything she does. He's always watching her. It's what he does. It's everything and all he knows.



## appendix nine



at last sight:  
voyeuristic  
intention?

liz hague  
level III  
may 1999



The relationship between the performers of *At Last Sight* and their audience is one of great interest, due to its lack of traditional convention i.e.; the unwritten rule that neither company invades the other's space. Here we see the performers work in the audience's 'designated' area and particular spectators are embraced within the piece itself – yet what effect does this have? The question I would like to address is whether such a direct interaction created a voyeuristic feel. As I cannot speak for many of the audience members, I will concentrate on the performer's opinions – predominantly my own. I would particularly like to ascertain whether such enjoyment from watching intimacy was invited by the piece itself, and if so for what purpose? I will be referring to some ideas which do not appear in the final construction, as I feel their inclusion is justified due to the line of progression *At Last Sight* has made.

The first consideration when researching was that perhaps there is a voyeuristic nature to all performance. That even in a piece where the audience occupy a space which is not overrun by the performers directly, these artists are still putting themselves on display to suffer great scrutiny from their watchers. Some may be seen as sexual objects when this was of no necessity to the piece. However, this essay is not concerned with all performance, and its relationship between the doer and the watcher, it would like to focus on performance which actively encourages a voyeuristic view. Although a lot of art may contain a hidden truth, *At Last Sight* involves its audience intimately, by implying that the truth is visibly exposed; "Most performance is disguised autobiography, however, this autobiography is a disguised performance" (Andrew Proudfoot, *At Last Sight*)

The second question to address is; can naturalism be identified as the foremost initiator of voyeuristic spectators or is it the "stage-audience exchange" (Bennett, 1990, p.22) of the postmodern theatre? Surely, one would expect the answer to be the former, where the audience is hurled in to a re-invented reality and expected to suspend all disbelief. Only then at their lowest awareness of fictionality, do they begin to feel like unauthorised watchers. Yet, if this is the case, what does *At Last Sight* intend to convey? A piece which utilises Brechtian techniques of Alienation, and rather than requiring a suspension of disbelief it simply asks you to believe. Bertolt Brecht desired to impose "an uncomfortable and self-conscious state on the audience in an attempt to reduce the gap between the two" (Goldberg, 1979, p.162). Although he was "always aware of the theatre's need to be geared in to reality" (Bennet, 1990,



p.24) his motivation was to provoke social change rather than pushing his spectators in to the role of voyeur. Therefore *At Last Sight* has taken Brechtian theory further, perhaps in an attempt to express the ineffectuality of naturalism.

Chrissie Iles gives us a definition of voyeurism when referring to the work of Abramovic and Ulay; “the audience’s witnessing of, but exclusion from, intimate experiences shared by the artists”. Intimate experience such as *Imponderabilia* (1977) where they stood naked, facing each other in a doorway which the spectators would have to pass through. On second thoughts, perhaps this example is not the most appropriate as the audience are far from excluded from the intimacy – close proximity of nudity is something which makes many people very uncomfortable. In 1997, doodpaard performed *2SKIN* at the Green Room, Manchester, here the audience was confronted with male and female nudity in close vicinity and the feeling it created was unfamiliar. Nervousness, a sudden sense of panic about what one was about to watch. At the time this was passed off as shock at witnessing something unusual, however now I wonder whether it was a fear of watching something which we feel we should “see on video and not live, cause I feel like a real voyeur, like I’m intruding” (Audience member at Franco B. performance quoted on South Bank Show).

Returning to the work of Ulay and Abramovic, it has been said that “voyeurism.....was given it’s starkest expression in the action, *Communist Body – Capitalist Body*” (Stedelijk, 1997, p.13). This was where 11 known guests were invited to a private room just before the artists’ birthday (they shared one). However, when they arrived they discovered their hosts asleep on the floor where they stayed for the duration of the piece. The guests were unaware of a camera filming their actions and yet it was the action of both observing and participating which made them so uncomfortable, as they looked upon the couple; “objectified in silence and stillness, here in a kind of living death” (Stedelijk, 1997, p.13). Thus implying that the passivity of the piece was the perpetrator of such intensity;

As the performance of *At Last Sight* opened in Liege, the audience came in to see the performers tidying up the space, pouring drinks and smoking cigarettes. They shared the odd quiet word and visually acknowledged their witnesses, providing them with glasses of wine – reminiscent of Pina Baush’s *Tanztheatre* “where separation from social space was undermined” (Counsell, 1996, p.226). When everything was prepared and each actor had found a location, there was silence. Although every<sup>405</sup>



performer knew who would be the next to speak, they also knew the possibility that anyone could choose to interrupt this moment. They looked around at each other, motionless, waiting, expectant, until Chris began. This appeared to be a moment to introduce the intimacy of the piece and perhaps the audience began to find "themselves implicated in their voyeurism". (Carr, 1993, p.20)

This essay will now turn to investigate this last point with reference to some of the audience members spoken to in Liege. The most interesting reaction came from a Jordanian Director – Makhled Al Zyoudy – who believed the performers were going to have sexual intercourse on stage. His reasons behind this were the number of boundaries broken down in the performance and the fact the cast were past or present lovers working out their feelings. (see appendix 1) However, most of these reasons were in fact deceptions, as he believed they were choosing the action randomly from a running order (see appendix 2) and speaking their truths directly to the audience. Therefore, was the voyeuristic feeling intensified by these deceitful truths?

It is difficult to provide a definite answer to this question as one cannot speak for an entire audience, however, it does appear that this rehearsed truth enhanced the feeling of intrusion for certain spectators. When speaking with the group from Buffalo University, New York, after the performance, they expressed a great empathy for what we were trying to do and an acknowledgement of how personal the piece was. Their comment of 'perhaps too personal' made me wonder if maybe we had made them uncomfortable with our intimacy, and immediately this posed questions such as; was this the piece's intention? Was this voyeurism encouraged by the performance?

The play began as a very intimate piece, as the lyrical language demanded a languorous tempo and subdued voice - sometimes just whispers in to a microphone - forcing the audience to listen attentively; "In the room with her it is dark, and sshhhhh it is very, very late." (Liz Hague, *At Last Sight*) The group soon identified a woman's suicide emerging from the text, which they began to work towards presenting onstage, through movement and text. Watching someone end their own life must be the ultimate voyeuristic experience - an event no one is supposed to watch passively. Therefore, this occasion reflects the more sexually explicit moments of the piece as again the audience is drawn to watch through morbid fascination. Pornography has in fact been described as "a mixture of eroticism and death, liberation and defilement" (Savran, 1986, p.44). Photographs are taken of moments, to preserve them forever,



enhancing this feeling of intrusion upon the performers. These photos are generally taken of sensual moments and yet they have the feel of crime scene evidence, thus again blurring the lines between sexuality and fatality.

Of course, there are many scenes where the audience is asked to accept what they are watching as fiction and not necessarily believe they are witnessing truth, such as the Arabella and Paris episodes. The voyeuristic feel of these moments was intended to increase through their filmic quality (ie; little movement and naturalistic speech) as we often find it easier to become engrossed in what we watch on the screen rather than the stage. In addition, these small snippets of film created a contrast with those moments presented as reality. They created an intimacy the audience could feel comfortable and distanced from, then suddenly they are thrown into an uneasy familiarity as the performers communicate directly with certain members. This was interesting as the performers felt that although those spectators spoken to were the ones put on the spot it was those seated around them who became intensified voyeurs as they found themselves listening to private conversations such as; "I know you've been watching me, is this because you find me attractive". There are also moments of intrusion where the audience are not expected to answer, but their personal space is invaded. One example being the moment when Sarah places a member of the audience's hand on her arm, looks them in the eye and says "Take... your... hand... off... me" (Sarah Robertson, *At Last Sight*). The reaction to this is as yet unknown, but I am interested in whether they will appear threatened or simply enjoy the close contact – the feeling that this moment is exclusive to them.

Not only is this voyeurism encouraged by interaction but also the actions and words spoken on stage, inviting the audience into the privacy of the performers. In *Liege*, when Chris was carrying Sarah's body, he informed both the audience and the performers that "He wants to touch her" (Chris Roberts, *At Last Sight*). Even the actors looked away as he embarked on a violation supposedly prohibited. When Sarah Skelton puts on her lipstick she says; "Am I doing this for your gaze?" (Sarah Skelton, *At Last Sight*), immediately confronting the spectators' intrusion, and posing the question; is she doing this because her character needs make-up, or is she inviting those watching to gaze on her as a woman? I would like to point out here the difference I experienced when being directly spoken to in the performance space and then when I was seated amongst the audience. Although I was still a performer, when



Glenn spoke his lines; "I love you, could my lips ever lie to yours" (Glenn Robertson, *At Last Sight*), I suddenly felt a little embarrassed and a lot more self conscious of those seated around me. It is moments such as these which cause me to believe in the spectators inevitable voyeurism.

When the group returned from Liege and began to re-work the piece, new ideas materialised but not all were necessarily used in the piece. For example; two of the cast undressing on the stage, yet covered by a sheet, in fact for all the audience know, they're not even naked! Again, a Polaroid was to be taken and pinned up as evidence, but too far away for the audience to really see. It's almost like they are being dared to become voyeurs, tempted to give in to that sexual pleasure, but always denied the entire picture. When Sarah Skelton informs the audience she will take her shirt off as long as no one looks at her, she is attempting the impossible. Is any human prepared to close their eyes and imagine the nudity of the person in front rather than look straight at them? No, because our voyeuristic nature is far too strong, the desire to look at something/someone for sexual pleasure. However, the group began to feel they were presenting the 'woman' as a victim, even though they started with the idea of a couple destroying each other, how did this happen? Is it inevitable that a woman being watched takes on the victim status? Akin to the photography of Cindy Sherman, whose portrayal of the female – herself – began as simply obscure and yet turned into something grotesque as 'she' became a symbol of the slaughtered prey. (Cindy Sherman Video)

There were times when *At Last Sight* confronted its audience with a more openly sexual attitude. For example; the moment where the four men get themselves in to typical female pornographic poses. The men were baring sexuality, but perhaps not their own. This moment was intended to disturb slightly as some may have considered it erotic, yet also grotesque. When watching pornographic material belonging to the Wooster Group, their audience took the stance; "It doesn't exist", they're think, 'I'm just going to stare up there. I don't want to be a voyeur" (Savran, 1986, p.37), where as the Liege audience appeared to see a humorous side. They were still experiencing voyeurism, but it now felt licensed as they could laugh. The audience were also confronted with sexually explicit language in Chris' 'Fassbinder Porn' and Sarah's 'Orgasm', generally people don't wish to be faced with somebody else's sexual pleasure or the clinical detail of their own arousal.



One may wonder what reaction would have been received if the women had taken on the role of the pornographic pose and whether the audience would have expected this. However, there is a different connotation behind the naked female: "The exposure of the female body in particular, whatever the intent of the artist, always runs the risk of being re-appropriated by the eroticizing, patriarchal gaze" (Campbell & Spackman, 1998, p.57). In our society, the gaze on women becomes licensed in a performative context and in the world of politics, yet also in the underworld of prostitution and erotic dance. This has been explored by artists such as Annie Sprinkle and Karen Finley who exhibited their naked bodies in an explicit manner. However, they were the ones in control of the piece as they decided who looked and who touched – unlike a prostitute (Counsell, 1996, pp.222-4). The group did have this similar feeling of control over their spectators, yet they did not go to the extremes of Yams Up My Granny's Ass and they did not wish the piece to be "serving a repressive, male gaze" (Campbell & Spackman, 1998, p.63), therefore they swapped the gender to subvert this. This is not a feminist point, they are simply showing how easily the gaze can become licensed on the men, as the voyeur can just as easily be a woman, and as already noted the 'gaze' can effortlessly be placed on the audience also

Although the audience may feel licensed to look at the performers on stage, that does not mean there is no feeling of resistance within them. Just like the group, who wanted to be looked at and yet couldn't help feeling as if they were exposing something they shouldn't - it is all about our internal contradictions. Just like the performance itself – one big contradiction – Sarah lies on the bed saying "I wouldn't want to fool you" (Sarah Robertson, At Last Sight), yet the audience have already digested the lies presented in their programme. In the case of the audience, one is instilled from youth that pornography is bad, masturbation is bad, and one must not have sexual intercourse until married - thus suppressing our sexual appetite. Although one may not adhere to these rules, it begins to explain our fear of watching sexual activity in public, particularly when there are other spectators who know you are watching! "We have, as psychoanalyst Melanie Klein realised, a fascinated horror with bodies: to explore our fantasies about the body is a dangerous foray" (□ HYPERLINK <http://www.mg.co.za>) □□<http://www.mg.co.za>)□. Perhaps the only way we can overcome these voyeuristic fears is to explore these fantasies.



To conclude, I do believe there was a voyeuristic relationship between the audience and performers of the Liege performance of *At Last Sight*, of course, I am only able to speak for myself and a few of the spectators. The spectators' status as voyeur was undeniably enhanced by their belief in the 'truth', those who believed the cast to be lovers seemed to feel a greater degree of intrusion. I would like to back this up with an example of human nature within the performance group itself. It occurred when two of its members formed a relationship out side of the play - suddenly art had begun to mirror life! As soon as this change was known to the rest of the group, their kiss - within the piece - took on a different meaning. The other performers did not feel they should be watching such a truthful display of emotion - therefore taking on the role of voyeur themselves.

Of course, it is a difficult task to establish the general feel of an audience when they are now scattered across the world! However, hopefully this essay has managed to establish the performance's voyeuristic intention as it dared its audience to give in to its enjoyment, providing them with a semi-licensed gaze, and yet had to pull some of their material back as the power of the human gaze began to take control of the piece. The group was very interested with their audience - how much they would believe, how well they would respond to their invasion. They were very aware of "Duchamp's notion that it is the observer who completes the work of art" (Van der Marek quoted in Kaye, 1994, p.43). Perhaps one could even suggest that they "made the viewer's response the subject of the piece" (Stedelijk, 1997, p.13), a response which conveys the stereotype of the spectator. Their willingness to believe expresses a move away from naturalism, perhaps even the death of naturalism as truth takes over from rehearsed realism.

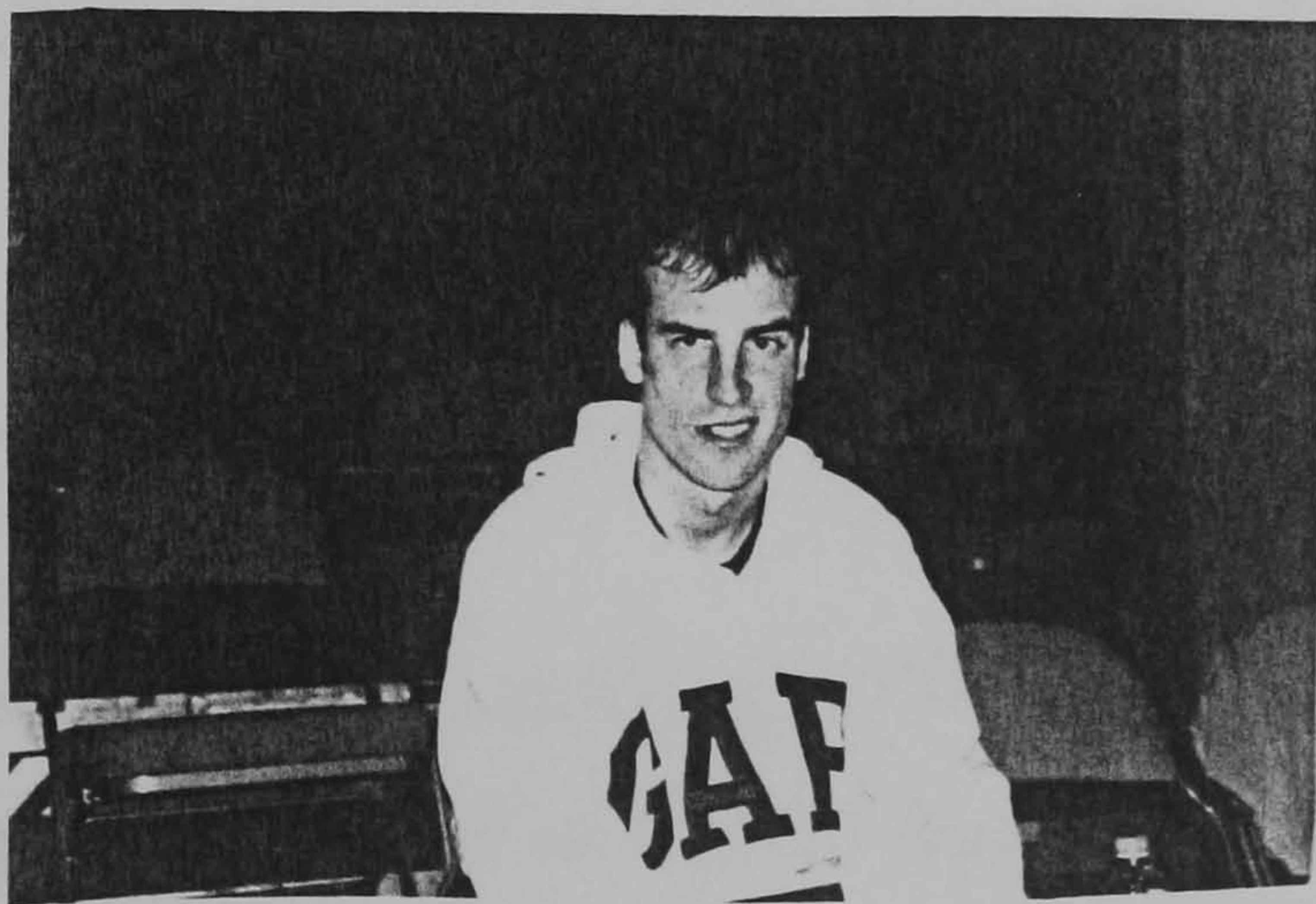
However, the viewer's response was not easily definable as their desire to watch clashed with their fear of perversion. As Mekhled Al Zyoudey said "I loved your work, it was so new, but I was not sure if I wanted to watch". *At Last Sight* confronted the audience with their conflicting feelings, and according to Marina Abramovic, this is the way forward; "Now that I get in to my fifties I discover more and more that we definitely must learn about the contradictions in ourselves and not to be ashamed or afraid of them" (Stedelijk, 1997, p.121).



JF

*Research and Production for Performance.*

Theatre is  
What  
Theatre Did...





## Theatre is what Theatre Did.

Whereas the essay submitted for 'Contemporary Theatre Practice' dealt with heuristics, the nature of meaning and the gulf between the intention of the writer and the interpretations of the reader - an area dealt with during that module - this essay will concentrate on applying those thoughts to the year-long practical project that became 'At Last Sight'. The two areas are inevitably and inextricably linked by the inseparability of the hand typing this essay, which has already typed that one. The ideas of that are the basis for this. To have written then is to apply now when words having translated thoughts now apply context.

To describe myself as an actor could only - or let me say primarily - be justified in the way that Foreman, (1991) writes of himself

'I am a comic actor. The more people laugh, the better I like it. I'm happier the nights we get ten laughs instead of seven. If we get fifteen laughs, I'm even happier. I wish the audience were roaring with laughter throughout.' (Foreman, R. 1991, p. 16).

By reputation, I am, as Foreman is 'a comic actor'. My performances on stage (as with many off the stage) are those that make people laugh. I base the 'success' of my performance on the number of people I make laugh and indeed the number of times people laugh throughout a performance. However, this year saw a change of focus for my actorly self. My involvement in 'At Last Sight' which, although encompassing many amusing aspects during rehearsal, started out with the intention of being what appeared to be a serious piece; one that was not necessarily striving to become a comedy and did not end up being comical.

'At Last Sight', was written originally by John Freeman as part of his PhD submission. I use the term 'originally' because as written, the original script merely consisted of words on paper. There were no stage directions, no indications of who says what, no determination of characters and indeed, no further indications of gender - the breakdown within the play, nor what sequence of words is attributed to which gender.



It was not fixed. It was subject to interpretation and of development. It was, however, evident that the text was somewhat autobiographical and therefore the show was to reflect autobiography: "Most autobiography is disguised performance, this performance is disguised autobiography." (At Last Sight. 1999). As will be seen later the extent to which this would occur turned out to be far greater than anyone, even the author, (of that text and, indeed of this work), had originally expected. 'At Last Sight' had no particular, definite narrative, other than the fact that women were women and men were men. It was experimental in so far as each night would be different, things constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed in different ways. It was also a mixed bag of acting, acted acting and non-acting. The ability to be oneself on stage was constantly prevalent and the essence and extent to which this would happen was presented in different ways and, again, differed from night to night.

A starting point for the project was to read the text and each member of the group chose what s/he wanted to say within the final performance. This personified the fact that even at the early stages the text was not to be fixed, and was therefore subject to change. Given the text we had to work from (and with) it was then up to the group to decide where go next. In a way, the task ahead was to devise a piece of theatre from a stimulus, (the text). Given the stimulus, the group now had to work together, creatively and practically in order to achieve the result as shown firstly in Liege, Belgium, then again for the performance in Chester, England

Devising is a process of making theatre that enables a group of performers to be physically and practically creative in the sharing and shaping of an original product... (Oddey, A. 1994, p. 1).

As addressed in the first part of this double submission - a submission which is both separated and inseparable - the links between this essay and the one submitted for 'Contemporary Theatre Practice' rest with myself, my typing hand, my thoughts and my ideas. However, the connections go further than that. I spoke of truth and what constitutes truth. A large aspect of 'At Last Sight' was the inclusion of 'truths'. However, as previously seen from my own assumption, the actuality of truth lies only



(and entirely) with the beholder and disclosure of such immediately initiates the truth into being subject to interpretation. Taking my own interpretation, the telling of the 'truth', arguably has the potential, at times, to be as influential to the listener as the portrayal of a character, by the actor on stage. Does the idea that once a truth is told it becomes what can only be described, and understood as a lie, constitute the telling of a lie? A lie: an indifferent instance of continual deceit. A seemingly deceitful act momentarily prolonged only by the possibility of the hidden 'truth' of the deceiver and the ignorant acceptance, or denial, of the intentional believer.

'At Last Sight' played home to many 'truths' and lies. They existed within the group and they existed in front of the audience - both in England and abroad. The existence of such 'truths' also gave licence for the existence of Nietzsche's 'illusions'. Those 'truths' within the group were extracted by means of a certain 'truth' (and indeed an 'illusion'), used in the performance - alcohol. I use the term 'illusion' as is created by a 'truth'. The use of alcohol, for the most part, was as real as the actors in the show. However, this 'truth' acted as a disguise to create an illusion. Some of the opened bottles on the set actually contained wine-coloured grape juice, yet only exposing the audience to the real wine, created the illusion that all the bottles contained the real thing. The realistic element of the grape juice gave scope for us in the show to expand on the notion of acting and non-acting. When drinking real wine we were doing just that, when drinking grape juice: we were acting drinking wine. Even given the occasional sceptic in the audience, for the most part - as determined by conversing with members of the audience after the show - it was generally accepted and believed that all of the bottles contained real wine.

Returning to one's inner-self and losing, (or if not losing, placing to one side for a while) one's inhibitions and indeed allowing oneself to partake in things that might not seem acceptable should the alcohol be removed. With the aid of alcohol, it soon became apparent that the dynamic that existed within the group hosted a little more than that which had been initially, I assume, anticipated. The truths were not as they originally appeared. The truth of the matter is that there is no actual truth of the matter, only different interpretations as to what happened. The programme that we sent in advance of the festival opening in Belgium invited the audiences to believe that there were either existing or previous relationships within the group. The 'truths'<sup>473</sup>



that actually accompanied the group to Belgium were not necessarily as they had previously appeared; as Plato suggests, "the 'truth' of things did not lie in the way they most directly appeared - not in the shadows on the cave wall, for example, but in the figures who cast them." (cited in Wheale, N. ed. 1995, p.132). In this way more 'truths' actually became apparent from the group, about past experiences with each other, than had been anticipated in the sending to Liege of the programme.

Another issue that arose had a certain resemblance to invisible theatre, when the lie of two members actually being married and then split up in Belgium, after the revealing of the 'husband' sleeping with another member of the group was told after the performance. The effect of this 'truth' (lie?) was immense. Groups that we shared accommodation with were fascinated by the fact that this could happen and more so that it could happen and have so much relevance to the piece. The 'wife' (of same surname as a man in the group - the 'husband') had sat at the back of the set crying throughout the whole performance, while the rest of the group performed without her. This had actually stemmed from another reason, but once the 'truth' had been told to one member of the audience, it had to be carried on. Therefore, after the performance it was continued for the following days until we left. To see the relationships on stage is to accept a notion of performance, however, for the spectator to be subjected to an extension of that which is seen on stage is to alter the aesthetic notion of what had happened previously. The distance from where the spectator is viewing has changed, therefore changing the outlook of such. It is...

...the distance of the spectator, which determines the nature of the aesthetic...The spectator does not hold himself aloof at a distance of aesthetic consciousness enjoying the art of representation...the real emphasis lies ultimately on what is represented and recognised and to share in it is not a question of choice. (Gadamer, H.G, 1975, p. 117).

The outcome of this was the fact that a particular American director spent hours consoling the 'cheated wife' at the same time as the 'husband' and the 'mistress' were acting as if they were getting together, much to the disgust of the Americans. It has since evolved that, this lie, actually represented a 'truth'. Another male member of the



group was actually engaged to be married when the project began. However, during the process of making and performing 'At Last Sight', he and the 'cheated wife' fell in love and are now happily together - unless by some disturbing continuance of 'invisible theatre' the nightly love making of the couple exists only to satisfy a Boalesque notion of art within the realm of life.

As previously stated, the project was about acting, acted acting and non-acting. This leads me onto the idea of interpretation and meaning. Much of the work centred around the actors, and not necessarily the characters within the show. The actors were in a sense the characters, inasmuch as everyone used their own names and either presented themselves on stage or when re-presenting themselves were actually representing the character using their own name. 'At Last Sight' was constructed where a '...working process established a grid on which to operate where meanings were generated within the parameters of the...text.' (Wheale, N. ed. 1995, p.166). As the group chose the segments of text that they wanted to speak, the meanings were derived from what the text chosen meant to firstly the individual, and then to the group as a whole. Only after the segments of text were chosen, did the words constructing the text develop and generate meaning. As suggested in 'Theatre is what Theatre Does' 'Meaning only exists once the author or the reader has associated a meaning with those words.' (Robertson, G. 1999, p.3).

So what of meaning within the group? For me the most substantial meaning extricated from the show belonged to a male member of the group, for all intents and purposes named 'King'. This particular member found the piece somewhat relevant and meaningful to a particular point in his present (as it was then) life. For King, once he had read the initial text and begun working with it, the idea of a relationship, the truth and lies within such a relationship and indeed the feeling generated from such, held much resemblance with that of his own life. It seems somewhat appropriate here to include a piece from 'Feminism and Deconstruction' on King's behalf ?

We do not yet know what women *are*. It remains uncertain what it would be like to be a woman (to be part of the group "women"), just as it remains uncertain what precisely would constitute knowledge of women. (Elam, D. 1994, p. 27).



King's desire was to utilise the piece for self-expression in such a way that could be interpreted as acted within the show. He wrote a piece of text to be spoken by himself, as himself - later to be called 'King's Plea'. The short piece was to act as a disassociation from the 'acting' that he performs just <sup>prior</sup> previous to it, the difference being the relationship between the performativity of the King's acted self and his actorly self, presenting a piece of text as if it were spontaneous. The basis for King's plea rested with his personal situation and involvement with females (or certain female), at the time. His plea came from his feelings and he wanted to let people (or maybe a certain person), know how he felt. The show was about a relationship and indeed generated certain feelings within the group - as seen with the 'cheated wife' and the male member leaving his fiancé for her. What was happening in King's life subsequently progressed into a memorable part of 'At Last Sight'. Goffman relates this to the fact that performance is related to the performers' surroundings, evidently this was the case with King

When the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of a society, more so, in fact than does his behaviour as a whole. (Goffman, E. 1959, p. 31).

So for whom did King present himself? Well, as it turned out not just for the one concerned that he initially wrote the piece. On more than one occasion he received sympathetic responses from the audience after such admissions as "I guess what I'm trying to say is that I'm alone," and "I'm looking for someone, a kind of soul mate really" (At Last Sight. 1999). One particular girl came to see the piece twice, as it turns out, to see King again after being touched by his plea the first time she saw it.

This represented an interesting contrast within the show, as one of the females also spoke to the audience, asking them whether they thought that what she was doing was for their benefit and, indeed, for their "gaze"? When applying her make-up, for whom did she do it? Simply by talking to the audience would, possibly, seem enough to obtain their attention. However, where does the barrier of acting and non-acting lie within this part of the show? Is the female putting on her make-up for the benefit of



the audience, or for the next part of the show that she appears? It is not necessarily clear. However, with King, he is distinctly asking the audience to take note of what he says, in the hope that something might come of it. His actorly barrier might seem to be surpassed, or is it? At the same time as it might appear that King's spoken words are natural and not necessarily, specifically learned, there did exist one line that came across as being just that. After having said that he does not want anything heavy, he said, "God knows, I've made that mistake before." (At Last Sight. 1999), which always came across as being acted, instead of seeming almost spontaneous. It became a learned line as delivered by the actor. However, this seemed to be disguised in the way that a transition from 'acting' to 'non-acting' had already been made between King's "She was like a tattoo..." (At Last Sight. 1999), speech and his plea.

It would seem as though King used the nature of 'At Last Sight' to disguise the fact that he wanted to speak words that were meant for one, in such a way that they were actually heard by all. The way in which the performance was constructed left many issues to the interpretation of the individual spectator and therefore who was to say when the members of the group were acting, non-acting and portraying acted acting. This was the ideal disguise for King, as who determines whether or not to take his plea serious<sup>ly</sup> or not?

Illusions are created in order for them, at some level, to be believed. In theatre, it is rare that total illusion is achieved. Believing is the ability to convince oneself that something is true when it has the possibility of being false. Yet how different, or indeed, close is the relationship between truth and falsity (or in this case, truth and lies)? How real was the wine in the bottles in 'At Last Sight'? Even if the 'wine' is, for the most part believed to be real, this does not proclaim to suspend the possibility of disbelief. So if it is 'real', does that constitute the element of truth that exists within? As was suggested previously, truth is dependent upon the beholder and however s/he decides to disclose that 'truth' determines to what extent it remains true, (if it does at all). 'At Last Sight' had a great deal to do with the realisation of truth, or at least interpretations thereof, for the members of the group. It was also governed by each member's different meanings that they attributed to the piece. What did each member intend to portray when performing? And how did they want it to be received? Obviously, as seen in 'Theatre is what Theatre Does', one cannot assume that which



might be determined by someone else, nor can someone attempt to tell of someone else's thoughts. When looking at meaning, we saw that it was an individual concept, and therefore can only be determined by such. 'At Last Sight' presented the performers with the ability to govern their own intentions. King was able to voice his feelings in such a way that they could be heard by the person that he intended them for, without necessarily offering an 'obviousness' to his situation.

The truth, the lies, the intention, the interpreted, the meaning, the revealed. The sound of the wine spilling and the sound of water splashing. The sound of bristle on blade. The photos, the cigarettes, the chalk, the anticipation, wanting to talk. The absence and the presence. The audience, the eight performers. The female whispers, the fade, the bow. The bow.



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"Art is a lie which tells the truth" - Truth and Lies in 'AT LAST SIGHT'

'At Last Sight' started out as a mainly autobiographical text, written and directed by John Freeman. The text was not assigned to any particular people, and there was no hint of whether parts were meant for either males or females. The process began with each member of the group reading through the text and selecting the parts they wanted to speak in the play. The choices were totally individual, and any sections not chosen were not included in the performance. Over the months the group worked from the chosen sections of text, whilst also devising other scenes that seemed appropriate to the style of the piece. This process appears similar to that described by Churchill during her production of 'Joint Stock':

"The play is not improvised: it is a written text and the actors did not make up its lines. But many of the characters and scenes were based on ideas that came from improvisation at the workshop and during rehearsal. I could give endless examples of how something said or done by one of the actors is directly connected to something in the text" (Churchill in Oddey, 1994, p.50). ✓

In this essay I am going to concentrate on the truth and lies within 'At Last Sight', and how they altered the rehearsal process, performance, and general interpretation of the piece. I will also look at how truth and reality are perceived, and whether it is possible to successfully stage the 'real'. "You are getting closer to reality when you say that it 'presents itself'; that means it is not there, existing as an object. It is a process" (Cage & Charles in Kaye, 1996. p.3). ✓

As Goffman suggests in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959) characters staged in the theatre are not generally real. ✓ Therefore, an act in the theatre does not hold the same consequences as an act that happens in the real world, outside of the theatre. Usually the playing area would be sealed off from the outside world in ways which are sufficient to call what occurs in there fiction. However, with 'At Last Sight' this is not strictly true. The consumption of real alcohol throughout the piece by each member of the



to Kirby's acting continuum.

"Although acting in its most complete form offers no problem of definition, our task in constructing a continuum is to designate those transitional areas in which acting begins. What are the simplest characteristics that define acting?" (Kirby, 1987, p.6).

The simplest characteristics may be either physical or emotional, although it is easier to recognise physical acting than it is emotional. In 'At Last Sight' we have evidence of both these types of acting. The most obvious physical acting takes place during the drinking games, where each member of the group adheres to a fixed routine. They do not really involve any emotional thought, but the performers are nevertheless acting. However, there is also a degree of non-acting in the game when, for example, someone accidentally throws wine in their eye! There is also evidence of acting existing in emotional rather than strictly physical terms. One example is when Andrew pleads to the audience near the end of the piece. He begins: "Hi, my name's Andrew Proudfoot.." and continues by telling the audience how lonely he is, and inviting anyone that likes him to meet him after the show for a drink! In this instance Andrew is being himself, as much as he is not portraying a 'character', or pretending to be in some imaginary or represented place. What he is saying is certainly true as he wrote the text about himself, for himself to speak. It is also true that Andrew almost certainly believes what he is saying to be true, and yet according to Kirby, he is still acting. "Acting exists only in their emotional presentation" (1987, p.7). As Andrew is always aware of the presence of the audience and the fact that he is 'on stage', he will react to this situation by energetically projecting emotions and elements of his personality, for the sake of the audience. He is therefore acting out his own emotions and beliefs.

Throughout the piece there are many other incidents where a member of the group speaks directly to the audience, intending to give the impression that what they are saying is 'real' and spontaneous. When Liz and Chris apologise to the audience, they are acting as themselves. What they are saying is not true, but has been prepared and rehearsed many times before. However, the way the performance has been constructed allows for either of them to say something completely different during performance, thus, adding a certain



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group. means that there is an overlapping from the 'fiction' of the play into the real world. During and after each performance it was noticeably obvious that the performers were affected (some more so than others!) by the wine they had consumed. Although it was stated on the programme that any alcohol drunk in the piece is as real as the bottle suggests, I felt that some of the audience were still not convinced (and many that were seemed unable to comprehend why we hadn't 'acted' with cordial instead). So, in this case it is fair to say that the actions of the people in the play did spill over into the 'real' world.

Before considering the effect of truth and lies within the piece it is first necessary to assess what exactly can be interpreted as real, and whether it possible to stage reality at all.

"Offstage we view reality itself, but how can we view anything but appearance, however beguiling and refreshing, when we view what is presented onstage? Offstage one is oneself, whereas onstage one feigns to be another self" (Wilshire, 1982, p.3).

In this quotation, Wilshire is assuming that all performers are taking on a role, other than their own, on stage. In 'At Last Sight' this is an accurate assumption of certain scenes, such as 'Arabella and Paris' or the one between myself and Andrew; however, for a major part of the performance we all play ourselves. When I say to the audience "I'm still Sarah, I'm 21 years old, I'm known to some of you" I am not feigning to be anyone else. Although I am 'performing' in front of an audience, I am not pretending to be in a role other than my own. However, this then raises the issue of what is actually considered to be acting. As Kirby states, "To act means to feign, to simulate, to represent, to impersonate" (1987, p.3) but not all performing is acting. When I speak to the audience I am not pretending to be anyone other than myself, nor am I representing, or pretending to be in a time or place different to that of the audience. In most performances it is easy to tell when a person is acting or not acting, in 'At Last Sight' however, it is not so easy because the difference between the acting and the non-acting is very small.

To help try and establish the acting and non-acting in 'At Last Sight' it is helpful to refer



'realness' to what they do. This also raises an important question, is something more 'real' when it is spontaneous rather than rehearsed? Kirby would suggest that it actually makes no difference, because as long as you are aware of the presence of the audience you will always be acting. ✓

One of the major lies in 'At Last Sight' actually appears in the programme:

"This work is cast exclusively with lovers, and their relationships have informed the ways in which 'At Last Sight' has been both approached and presented: the group have worked through their own histories at the same time they have dealt with the present of performance"

The audience are given the impression that everyone in the group are, or have been at some stage, in a relationship with someone else in the group. This idea was used as a device to make the audience watch and interpret the play differently to the ways they would if they assumed the group had no history together. However, as with so many of the truths and lies in the piece, it was not as clear-cut as we first imagined. Not only had one of the men had sexual relations with nearly all of the women in the group, another man left his fiancé because he had fallen in love with one of the women. This is another incident whereby the 'reality' of the performance was becoming more and more blurred with the 'reality' of our everyday lives. The situation was certainly taken to the extreme when we performed in Belgium. If the audience were confused during the piece, they were left even more puzzled afterwards when everyone played up to their roles and pretended to be in relationships with other members of the group. Again, the lies in performance were bleeding into our everyday lives. ✓

Another device which we used during performance was that of sign language. The idea originally stemmed from a rehearsal where we were looking at different ways of communicating with the audience. It was decided that I would attempt to speak in nothing but sign language for the entire performance. Although challenging, there was a problem in that I was unable to say much other than 'my name is Sarah' and 'Jesus!'. However, in fitting with the rest of the play we agreed that it didn't matter if I just made a series of random hand gestures, all that counted was that it looked convincing, not that it actually



made sense. Some members of the group raised objections at this as they felt that we were deceiving people, and also that I may offend any sign readers who happened to be in the audience. However, it was agreed that I would try it and see how 'real' I could make it look. After a few rehearsals we also decided that at the beginning I would announce to the audience that:

"I will be speaking in sign language for much of the next hour. I can speak, it's just a theatrical device we're using designed to make words visual without resorting to a series of invented movements.."

This succeeded in enhancing both the truth and lies. By announcing 'I can speak' at the beginning, shattered any illusion that I was actually communicating by sign language because I was deaf. However, it also seemed to validate the sign language, suggesting that what I was doing actually made sense. When we finally came to perform in May, the sign language was just used at the beginning during my suicide text. Together with a few random gestures; what I actually signed translated as: "My name is Sarah. Maybe. Blue. White. Woman. Thank-you", but I gather from the people I spoke to afterwards that <sup>they, or least,</sup> everyone assumed what I was signing to be both meaningful and significant to the development of the performance.

Nietzsche believes that "truths are illusions we have forgotten are illusions" (1990, p.2). He also states that "truth is a kind of error without which a certain kind of being could not live.. there are no facts, only interpretations" (abid). This is certainly true of 'At Last Sight', for we present so many truths and illusions that in one sense perhaps there is no singular definition of the piece, but only the spectator's interpretations of it.

One of my favourite aspects of the play was when I went and talked to someone privately in the audience. In the early stages of rehearsal I would kneel in front of a man, however, this was later changed as we felt it made the woman appear too subservient. This device not only emphasised the lack of 'fourth wall', but also gave me an opportunity to experiment with truth and lies again. From night to night my conversation would vary depending on the response I got, however, it would normally begin in the same way:



"Why are you watching me? Why are you watching me and no-one else? Do you think I'm wearing this shirt because of you? Do you think I put this lipstick on because I thought you might like it?"

The responses I got were dramatically different every night. Sometimes I would get no response at all and the person would sit staring at the performance in order to avoid any eye contact with me. Others responded by saying they were watching me because I was pretty, or that I was interesting to look at, and some got embarrassed and denied having looked at me at all. I felt that this definitely added to the truth and lies of the piece because at least one person believed that what I was saying him was genuine. It was also interesting in that during the early stages I would say my lines without really thinking about what I was saying. However, the more times I did the 'scene' the more I began to truthfully believe in what I was saying and become genuinely interested in the response I got. By the final few performances I no longer felt like I was acting. ✓

So far I have attempted to show how some of the truth and lies have affected performance, and the different ways we have presented them to the audience. I have mainly concentrated on the occasions where the group are acting as themselves, however there are also incidents where we take on other roles. Both the 'Arabella and Paris' scene and the one between myself and Andrew, were designed to look like clips from a film. Rather than just playing the scenes naturalistically though, we decided to act as if we were still rehearsing, by reading our lines from the script. The audience were not aware that the lines we were reading were not from the actual play, and although I didn't feel that anyone would seriously be convinced that we were still rehearsing the scenes, one member of the audience did whisper to his friend, "why haven't they learnt their lines yet?". This demonstrates the difficulties for the audience in differentiating between what was true and what was a lie, and although some people found it confusing, I felt that it actually succeeded in making the piece more interesting to watch. ✓

I hope to have demonstrated how the truths and lies within 'At Last Sight' affected the way the performance was received and interpreted. I also hope to have shown how truth and



reality are perceived. As this essay explains, the truth and lies in the performance were not consistent from night to night, and I would even go as far as to suggest that each member of the group was not always aware of when others were being truthful or not. Therefore, it seems fair to conclude that truth and reality is something which is both constructed, and interpreted differently by everyone. As Erika Fischer-Lichte states:

"There is no opposition between a given reality and its representation.  
..there are as many realities as the different spectators can construct  
by relying on their own perception of performance"

(1995, p.103).

I would agree that this  
is good work and deserves  
to find itself in the [redacted] grade.  
Mark agreed. M.W.



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# DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA, DANCE AND THEATRE STUDIES

## MONITORING SHEET

Module Title and Number: *DR3014*

Student Name: *Sarah Lehtonen*

### WRITTEN WORK: Essays/Dissertations/Referenced Journals

Criteria	strong	→	→	→	→	weak
presentation						
utilisation of bibliography						
additional sources						
performance references						
appropriateness of references						
spelling and grammar						
referencing and bibliographic format						
conceptualisation and line of argument						
evidence of personal position						

### PRACTICAL WORK: Performance (Acting)

Criteria	strong	→	→	→	→	weak
expressive control (VOICE)						
expressive control (MOVEMENT)						
spatial awareness						
interactive skills within the ensemble						
realisation of role(s)						
working with audience response						
sustained concentration						
control of performance within role						
willingness to experiment						
ability to seize and maintain focus without detriment to others						

### GENERAL COMMENT

*First Marker (JF) [redacted]*

*Not enough to work with/ readers but ultimately remains over simplistic in understanding + analysis?*

*Mark*



## At last sight, alienating or liberating the audience?

This essay seeks to explore the 'writerly' nature of the performance of *At last Sight*, and the effect this had on the audience. Performances are either predominately 'writerly' or 'readerly'. The main question addressed in the essay will be, whether *At last sight* alienated or liberated its audience, through being 'writerly'. Brief explanations of these two terms will be given, as their meaning will become more apparent as the essay unfolds.

A 'writerly' performance invites the audience to establish (or write) their own meaning of that which they encounter. This type of performance allows for open interpretation. In contrast, the 'readerly' performance generally tells the audience member how to feel and think. *At last sight* achieved a multiplicity of interpretation through characteristics such as the lack of the following: character narrative or plot and logic of events, these and others will be discussed throughout the essay.

Stating that a 'writerly' performance allows for open interpretation may seem ridiculous, as all performance is perceived by people in different ways. David Savran observes,

"As with any piece of theatre, each spectator will be assured a different chain of associations and way of making sense of the action" (Savran, D 198 p.54.)

Any performance also has the opportunity to either suppress or enhance individual response. In 'traditional' theatre (for the purpose of this essay, this refers to 'theatre' that is possessed of a clear narrative), such as a Shakespeare



in produce or script!

play, a narrative or clear story is apparent, therefore even if people feel differently about it, the story will generally be read <sup>in</sup> the same <sup>ways</sup>. Traditional theatre promotes 'readerly' expectations, as Colin Counsell observes,

" perhaps the first thing that we expect of it is a plot or, more accurately, a narrative, a series of events and actions which succeed each other according to...logic." (Counsell, C 1996 p.3.)

In the twentieth century, many forms of 'theatre', or more appropriately performance, question the need for the aspects mentioned above, " the indispensability of each of these components has been challenged." (Counsell, C 1996 p.3) The emergence of Performance Art, (where art and performance blur), highlights this, as does the paratheatrical (going beyond the theatrical). It may be that these characteristics are dispensable for the performer, but not for audience member, this will be discussed in the essay.

However, when the elements mentioned by Counsell are apparent, the audience is guided more in their meaning making. For example, in 'Macbeth', a clear story exists- Macbeth commits murder in order to achieve power and subsequently is killed because of his actions. This is a simplistic summary, but one would assume that the majority of the audience members would be aware of this. In regards to 'Macbeth', the same understanding could be reached whether reading or viewing it; this is apparent with lots of work. If one read the words that are spoken in *At last sight*, the reader could interpret it as they wanted to, the same effect is achieved with the performance.

Are there no clues?

More 'traditional' or mainstream theatre, adheres to <sup>a</sup> <sup>of</sup> coercing the audience in interpretation and behaviour, with <sup>?</sup> rules laid out about the role of the audience



member. Restrictions are in place, some are explicit, such as not being able to smoke, others such as feeling that one cannot cough/talk/move or leave, are more implicit. Placing restrictions on the audience's behaviour in this way, enhances the restriction on their reaction. "Such uniformity of behaviour, however, is always to some degree also a uniformity of response." (Counsell, C 1996 p.21.)

*At last sight* strove not to restrict its audience, inviting them into an alternative 'theatre', where the performers spoke to them as they entered and offered them wine. The performers also talked openly to each other as the audience entered. This beginning was part of its comment on 'performance' itself, and being the usual rules that performers and audience members adhere to.

Audience members may feel more comfortable in the type of performance that restricts their behaviour, for example, where the fourth wall can serve as protective device for the audience. *At last sight* was not this type of performance as Chris Roberts observed, "I had hoped this would be the kind of performance <sup>where</sup> that I could pretend you weren't there, but every time I look up, I see you." (*At last sight*) The performance of *At last sight* observed both the existence of the audience and the existence of the performers' <sup>apart from</sup> 'self'. This contributed to the 'writerly' nature of *At last sight*. This may have been one aspect that could have disorientated the audience at first, but hopefully allowed for a more interesting and engaging performance. Contemporary artist, Robert Wilson also wishes to engage the audience in a more personal journey, his work seeks to promote free interpretation.



“ Most forms of theatre coerce the audience member into accepting their proffered meanings...Wilson in contrast seeks to cultivate each spectators individual response.” (Counsell, C 1996 p.180.) ✓

This license given to the audience may be confusing, liberating, or both.

I will now discuss how *At last sight* offered the audience the opportunity to make their own meaning<sup>s</sup> of the piece. Some of the elements discussed will also highlight how the work was connected to the 'postmodern condition', this is simply acknowledged here, but will not form part of the essay. ✓

I have talked about Shakespeare's work as 'readerly', mainly because of the rigid text that is apparent in his works. *At last sight* did originate as a text, written by John Freeman, a text without a linear narrative. The performers established their own ideas about the text, and the general consensus did <sup>didn't the director remember abt do this!</sup> emerge that it was about a relationship that had ended in some way. This is expressed in the <sup>U.S spelling.</sup> program for *At last sight*,

<sup>at the time</sup> “ If at last sight is not possessed of clear narrative, then we can at least recognize an information structure which communicates the salient points: women, a woman; men; a man; a performance space masquerading as another room; beginnings and endings, remembrance and remorse.” (Freeman, J 1999 Program) <sup>U.S</sup>

The last words ' remembrance and remorse' express what it was for the performers and director, but for the audience member, this may not be the case. <sup>hard on</sup>

The text of *At last sight* was largely discarded, but its influence is seen through the themes expressed in the piece, such as love, loss, desire and memory.

Therefore, the performance became more devised and eclectic, using music and film sound extracts, both on tape and spoken. This, therefore, placed more



freedom for the viewer to establish his/her meaning. More questions and answers can be sought, about, for example, the reason for using particular material, and placing them in the context of the whole. When a written text is apparent, possibilities of variation of interpretation may be reduced. The intention of *At last sight* was that no interpretation should be ruled out.

"Where a written text (rather than an improvised) dramatic text is produced, that text-whether familiar to the audience or not- will inevitably hold inscribed points of entry, strategies for interpretation." (Bennett, S 1990 p.151.)

Was it? I'm not convinced - "no interpretation" Didn't we pepper piece with moments designed to take the audience along a (broad) route?

*At last Sight* realised the potential of the creative role of the audience, informing the performance itself and their own meaning. This was evident when Liz Hague highlighted, that there was no point in rehearsing any more, stating, "We need an audience now." (Hague, L June 1999).

Does this serve as evidence? What about your feeling that maybe we should work more in rehearsals

"The 'audience' is invited and expected to operate as a co-creator of whatever menages and experience the event generates." (Carlson, M 1996 p.151.)

The performers in *At last sight* were engaged in a two-way relationship, where the performance could be driven by audience-reaction. For example, when Sarah Skelton gave the 'orgasm lecture', and Liz Hague gave related actions, the possibility of the audience's distraction from the words to the actions, would result in Sarah Skelton trying to recapture their attention. Therefore the audience was given license to drive Sarah Skelton's reactions, role-reversal.

The absence of an established text allowed the audience to be more open-minded and not effected by popular opinion, for example, 'king Lear' is designated as a Tragedy and 'Midsummer Nights Dream' a Comedy. Audiences are told what



to think, not only during individual performances, but also about playwrights, for example, Shakespeare, and the existence of canons. Jean.E. Howard observes of Shakespeare, and the traditional relationship between text and audience reaction, " as he orchestrated the play, he was indirectly orchestrating the theatrical experience of the viewer." (Howard, J.E 1984 p.6.) Some may feel more comfortable watching a performance where meaning is more obviously accessible, and would feel frustrated at being left to their own devices. The orchestration mentioned by Howard may also be apparent in *At last sight*, but his orchestration promoted, rather than restricted interpretation. *whose orchestration*

*At last sight* attempted to allow the audience members to use their imagination. *a collective imagination, or individual imaginations?* Meyerhold recognised that audiences were (through the dominant form of naturalism) being refused the power of their own imaginations.

" His earliest writings challenge the conventions and underlying assumptions of naturalist theatre and pay direct attention to the creativity of the audiences." (Bennett, S 1990 p.5.) ✓

Meyerhold referred specifically at that time to the use of set/design, and the way that every detail was, or tried to be, exact or 'real'. Meyerhold observed that audiences that viewed medieval drama, succeeded in doing so by using their imaginations. *At last sight* took this further, it was not just about trying to imagine that it was day/night/castle/hotel room, for the audience it was about deciding what the performance meant for them. The work of Robert Wilson takes this

*how?* further, and some people dismiss his work as making no sense at all, but here *who?* lies the question of how audiences respond to not being told what to think; *how will you establish this?* acceptance or dismissal? An audience member at Compiègne did in fact *SP*



question *At last sight's* status as theatre. In answer to this, it was still held in a performance space, lighting was used and we were at times demonstrating being other than ourselves. For this particular audience member who had traditional ideas about 'theatre', these elements mentioned should be demonstrative of *At last sight's* status as 'theatre'. Yet I also recognise that *At last sight* is more appropriately cast under the heading of 'performance'. This audience member's reaction highlights the frustration that may occur by some, at not being told what to think.

Are these the only elements that made it 'theatre'?  
What about costume, story, acting words, rehearsal, props etc.  
In what ways could it not be regarded as theatre?

is one comment evidence of this?

However, *At last sight* did offer tangible aspects but remained open to interpretation, for example, through the presence of emotion but absence of character. Emotion was expressed, which the audience could buy into, if only for a short time, for example, Liz Hague drowning and then <sup>asking</sup> stating, "Is that enough?" (Liz Hague *At last sight*) The absence of character is one main reason that the play *At last sight* was 'writerly' rather than 'readerly'. A difficulty is imposed on the audience with absence of character. Characters were not introduced, established or built upon as the performance progressed, the audiences were not informed through characters, as they may be in a 'readerly' performance. This was enhanced through the performers use of their own names. The performers presented different layers to themselves and acted selves.

This confusion of reality and fiction may have left the audience members questioning when acting was actually occurring. David Robertson, an audience member at Chester, stated that he could not at times decipher what was real and what was part of the performance. This is connected to the way in which the



performers interacted on stage, often whispering to or talking to each other (inaudible to the audience) The performers did to adopt 'character', other than themselves, but the selves were also apparent, through lines such as " My name is Sarah, I speak a little Welsh" (Sarah Robertson *At last sight*) "I'm still Sarah, I'm 21 years old " (Sarah Skelton *At last sight*) and " My names Andrew Proudfoot" (Andrew Proudfoot *At last sight*). The one time that different names were used, they still did not inform the characters of the apparent 'couple', " Call me Arabella, and you can be...Paris" (Liz Hague *At last sight*) The audience member has to seek why/how these are connected for the individual performer or performance as a whole. Therefore the spectator is continually trying to make decisions about what is occurring.

*more line second take*

*Don't make assumptions about your audience.*

This is similar to the performance of *Brace Up!* by the Wooster Group,

" performances often featured what appeared to be 'real' behaviour, actors relaxed, prepared and discussed roles, and even arranged props. The overall effect was to break down the distinction between locus and platea, offering the audience no coherent other-place." (Counsell, C 1996 p.228-229.)

*neither*

As characters were not established ~~nor~~ was a narrative, the performance does begin and end and has a middle, but this did not take the form of the usual, conflict, struggle, resolution. Yet this lack of logical narrative opened up the interpretative freedom of the performance. Linear events did not occur, and this statement from the program,

" the text for *at last sight* is not fixed, and each member of the group will speak and perform only the sections they choose during any given performance." (Freeman, J 1999 Program)



But it wasn't strictly true, was it

enhanced the random nature of the performance. This introduced the element of spontaneity for both performer and audience member. Many performers have utilized spontaneity, for example John Cage's piece, 'Untitled Event', allowed a number of artists to do what they wanted, often overlapping each other.

" each participant was free to choose what he or she would do, but none knew what the other had planned." (Counsell, C 1996 p.221.)

Another example is that of Rose English in 1991, 'My Mathematics', which involved having a horse on stage, which would inevitably do what it wanted.

Although the element of spontaneity in *At last sight* began as a lie, it became truth (especially by the last performance at Chester). Either way, the statement in the program informed the audience's perception of the fragmented events that occurred. The audiences were told from the outset that meaning could be made through their own perceptions. The audience may have been intrigued or put off by the apparent <sup>ly</sup>unpredictable nature of *At last sight*, not being bound by cause and effect.

? which one?

This fragmentation of narrative may have made the audience member feel alienated, as they <sup>plural</sup> may find this structure disorientating. Yet, again this did give the prospect for different reactions, understanding or dismissal. Events were repeated, for example, at different times during the performance Sarah Robertson and Sarah Skelton lay down as if they were dead, yet this still offered no more explanation as to why this happened. Confusion or contradiction played a big part in the audiences' reception of *at last sight*, but hopefully, through the confusion will come ideas/questions/answers. As audience member Martin

evidence



Cröckett observed, " It really made me think about performance in general and I was able to make up my own story." (Chester May 28<sup>th</sup>) Confusion is offered when Sarah Robertson shouts at Chris Roberts on the microphone, expressing anger and distress." nothing you could say could hurt me...I loved you more so mush more than you loved me." (Sarah Robertson *At last sight*) Immediately afterwards they kiss, diffusing the emotion and situation that has just been established.

Well, okay, but has it really been 'established'?  
Isn't it always already undercut by the rest of the piece?

The confusion in *At last sight*, regarding narrative and meaning, was grounded in the comment that it endeavored to make on performance itself. At last sight and its performers refused the frames (plot/narrative, character, resolution.) that many people may perceive as indicating it as performance in a traditional sense.

" Frames, then, constitute the foundations of sense making, for they determine how we perceive and read works. Thus the exploding of such frames—even in limited, partial and momentary ways—effects the most potent assault against available strategies of making meaning." (Counsell, C 1996 p.210.)

A 'writerly' performance like *At last sight* leaves the audience asking more questions, even if they decide that the performance is futile because it offered no apparent meaning, they think more. At times in the essay I may appear to speak for an audience as a whole, yet specific opinions are offered. However, I will now examine my own reaction to a 'writerly' performance, *ShowTime* by Forced Entertainment, in order to highlight my own feelings of liberation and alienation as an audience member. It is indeed my experience of this type of work that



made me question how the audience members may have felt when faced with *At last sight*.

Forced Entertainment is a company that reacts against the imposition of the media upon us all, therefore it is almost inevitable that their work offers the opportunity for individual meaning to flourish. As Tim Etchells of Forced Entertainment states

"...we're trying to make theatre that's both emotionally and intellectually engaging, allowing audiences to create their own meanings in the spaces between the texts, a theatre that trusts in its audiences to find its own way through." (Etchells, T in *Devising Theatre* 1994 p.85.) ✓

*Why no italics here?*

ShowTime did not possess a clear narrative and characters were not apparent, also an obvious transition took place, at the beginning an actor stood on stage alone and spoke to the audience, and informed the audience of when they had begun. I felt confused at watching *ShowTime*, asking over and over what did it mean, stating that I didn't understand it, but realized that I had at times laughed and felt sad. I had developed my own way of viewing the performance, enabling me to attain my own meaning. I was disorientated by the performance, as I had, like many people, a traditional and narrow view of 'theatre'. *ShowTime* also had a chaotic structure, which at first I found disorientating, but I later realised that it was this apparent chaos that held the performance together. The chaotic nature of *ShowTime* ensured that I was constantly trying to understand what was happening. I kept looking for the meaning that was trying to be conveyed and if a deep significance was to be found. After the performance I realised that it was my own meaning that became important. To use an analogy, *ShowTime* did not



bake my cake for me, but gave me the ingredients and told me to go and cook. In *ShowTime*, much was presented, but implication was left up to the individual. It is understandable that audience members watching *At last sight* may have felt alienated. When watching *ShowTime* I felt that I had missed the point. I realised that this was not the case, and that I enjoyed the performance not because the story was good or the acting was impressive, but because it engaged me and made me think. It introduced me to a new way of viewing theatre and opened my mind to other types of performance, rather than just traditional narrative driven theatre. I am not dismissing the validity of 'readerly' performances, and understand how people feel more comfortable with this type of performance.

In conclusion, I think that it is more interesting as audience member and performer, to engage in performance that allows for an array of interpretation. Through my involvement as both audience member and performer, I am aware that it may be more liberating for the performer, as they are able to explore ideas/ concepts/ theories more. This was apparent in *At last sight*, playing with modes of acting/ theatre/ boundaries. However, I think that *At last sight* contained enough to keep the spectator watching,

"No matter how adroitly I attempt to present my intentional revelations, I can be sure that there will be enough unintentional ones' to give the spectator an accurate impression." (Andrew Proudfoot *At last sight*)

— Well, Andrew said it, but he didn't write it.

These "unintentional" revelations may have been connected to the spontaneity of the performer or the spectator's own interpretation. Also, the "accurate impression" given to the spectator, may be accurate in different ways, as the individual decides what is accurate or not. Although there was no story



apparent in the performance of *ShowTime*, it is more memorable for me; a 'readerly' performance may offer a story that is easily absorbed, but just as easily forgotten. At last sight does not set out to tell a story, like *ShowTime*, "...may contain hints of narrative, but are not obliged to tell a story." (Oddey, A 1994 p.86.) At last sight is more concerned with how things are done rather than what is done, " At last sight is a struggle against artifice..." (Freeman, J 1999 Program) Sp

For the audience of *At last sight*, their struggle against having meaning imposed on them is reduced. Therefore offering liberation. However, it is apparent that some may feel alienated, and not want to be part of this struggle.

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**At Last Sight: Truth, & lies, reality & fiction, acting & being.**

This essay will be an investigation and analysis of the performance, *At Last Sight*. The main terms of enquiry will be to what extent our notions of self (so far as these are readily accessible) inform the piece, and are played out within the frame of performance. In short: how, and if our 'true' realities find credence within the performative 'fictions'. It will also attempt to address the notions of performing truth and lies within the frame of art. Finally, I will strive to trace a continuum of acting styles. From acting to performing to just being, or self in the performance space. I acknowledge that the concept of self is now problematized, however, for the purpose of this essay, the term self is used to describe that state that is not recognized as performing for an audience in the traditional arena of performance. This transition is most easily traceable in the different places we performed *at last sight*, and this transition will be traced via a brief evaluative commentary of the different performances in each place.

When talking about a performance that one has been involved in, by means of concept, creation and performance, the main problem lies in how to academically theorize an essentially personal and playful piece. It is not my intention to ground this essay in totally theoretical parameters, but a cultural positioning may inform and suit the enquiry. I intend to frame the essay in personal articulations regarding 'acting' styles, and furthermore position myself within each style when and where they occur. However, to adequately contextualize this project, it might be of use to site previous paradigms that fall within a similar boundaries of style, content and concept, and then refer back to them throughout, in an attempt to give this thesis some frame of reference. The main theorist alluded to will be Wilshire.



Once the performance programme had been written, we, as a group, had made the collective decision to lie. This, for me is not ethically problematic, we had just decided to dress up lies as truth, and truth as lies. This is always the case in the representation of an other, of course, and indeed some might say, the skill of naturalistic acting is to implore the spectators to suspend their disbelief. Nevertheless, in *at last sight* we constantly refer to the fact, that we are performers, by means of drawing round the space, carrying scripts and telling the audience that: "...I'm no actor, I'm here because of who I am, not what I can do..." (ii). This is a crucial, though obvious difference between us as character, and us as performer. To what extent did we expose the failings of naturalistic modes of representation by effectively not asking our audience to suspend their disbelief, but rather to just believe? At this point, it must be noted that this apparent failure of naturalism is not intended to be an evaluative comment. It actually should be viewed as an exploration. Our undercutting of the few moments of naturalism that do exist, is in actual fact, an attempt to demonstrate its limitations, and in doing so propose an alternative style of presentation. Whilst feigning drowning, Liz Hague demonstrates a level of applaudable skill with great accomplishment, she then breaks the moment by asking: "Is that enough?" (iii). This is one of the most poignant moments of the entire piece, her immediate transition from actor to performer is a clear indication of her skill and furthermore visually, verbally and emotionally indicates our 'intention'. We never allow the audience the opportunity to emotionally engage in character and narrative drive. In doing so, we are, to a certain extent, disregarding the notion of empathy. If the audience has no immediately recognisable narrative or psychological motivation to cling to, then to what end can they empathize and understand what it is they are



seeing? Narrative and emotion are ways in which we as sentient beings make sense of the world, by categorically disenfranchising these understandings, there is a danger of alienating an uninitiated audience. In *at last sight*, many moments of apparent character and narrative are discredited soon after they are established, with the potential to frustrate an audience hungry for meaning. However, we save the audience (hopefully, and from most accounts probably) from this frustration and annoyance by imploring them to empathize with us as performers, as opposed to characters. "...where there's sadness perhaps you could act tears, who knows?...so for my absence of acted tears, I'm very, very sorry" (iv). This quote is symptomatic of an attempt to engage the audience in a certain amount of empathy and understanding. I am explaining my position, and furthermore, asking the audience to see me as a limited performer, and to not judge me too harshly. This exposing of the artificial, in some ways provided a safety net through which we could not fall, and also helped us establish the 'real'.

At the start of the process of making *at last sight*, we were interested in whether: 'truth had any currency in art'. This was an interesting theory that drew a variety of people together, nevertheless, I don't think any of us envisaged quite the route this would take. I know from John Freeman's perspective that he was not interested in taking theatre into the realms of the real, but was/is interested in putting the real into the theatre ( I use theatre in its broadest sense, encompassing all modes of performance). This is an important distinction, and leads us into a discussion of Willshire's paratheatrical theories, as well as towards an analysis of invisible theatre.

At what point can what is seen 'on stage' affect the real beyond the ephemeral event

"What is a human activity which is an artistic performance? An essential feature of this activity is that be bounded and protected by a playing area of some sort. The boundaries are spatial, temporal and cultural, and they



informed by our invisible theatre, but 'on stage,' I was acting the part of a performer rather than just performing.

Whilst performing in Chester, the levels of acting and performing significantly shifted. There are various contributory factors in this evaluation: the piece had evolved to a point that discarded the 'other' of character far more than in Liege. Formerly, there were more moments of acted 'other', the Road scene a crime suspects photograph, to name but two. Once back in Chester, the cast and director began to change the performance significantly. In hindsight, I now believe that our willingness to repudiate sections that had worked perfectly well in Liege was a finding of our performative selves, and the piece evolved to allow those voices to emerge. It now was moving toward an exercise in presenting fragments of sections of our selves. Most cast members had either created sections for themselves or become so familiar with the piece, that they began to stamp their indelible mark upon those sections which they performed. Some of this was by accident and some by design, but either way it had the effect of dissolving, to some extent, the acted and the performed self began to be prioritised and foregrounded. As the performance progressed this became even more obvious, and by Friday 28 May 1999 (the final performance in England) the extent to which the "actorly as if" was "sacrificed to the real is" (viii) was almost total, or as total as context would allow. ✓

In Compiègne, the foregrounding of self, was for me, complete. . . allowing for context, the piece could not afford to totally disregard<sup>SP</sup> the notion of performers performing, besides which, this is a state probably not possible to achieve anyway. However, I now felt so happily familiar with *at last sight* and my place in it, that at times I considered myself to be not performing. It was akin to being c



many in a room full of people, as opposed to being in front of an audience. It has to be said that these moments were usually when I was not directly involved in action/speech, nevertheless, the evolution of the piece was such, that I was involved most of the time, so to feel this way at all is quite spectacular. I had made a transition from actor to performer to self on stage. I genuinely felt closer to the presented self than the presented performer, and yet further still from the actor. Even whilst performing those sections which were previously Andrews' and Glenn's, I felt confident and familiar enough to assume ownership. As ever, we can never be sure how real and truthful any performance may look to an audience, but I can say with irony, that I had achieved as close to the (not naturalistic) on stage as I assume is possible for me to feel. At certain times, I genuinely felt there was more performance 'offstage' in Liege, than there was 'on stage' in Compigne, where I had reached a point where I managed to 'stage' the 'real me'



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radically limit the influences which can pass between events in the playing area and events in the outside world." (v)

So, if what is seen, no matter how true or real, is protected by the playing area (performance space) then surely anything (re)presented on stage is already compromised by the framing device, and is thus rendered artificial. When we performed *at last sight* in Liege, I believe we crossed the boundary into the paratheatrical. The programme that was distributed to the audience stated that:

"This work is cast exclusively with lovers, and their relationships inform the ways in which *at last sight* is both approached and presented: the group are working through their own histories at the same time as they are dealing with the present of performance." (vi)

The programme, in this respect, bore no significance to real events, it was just an artistic device used to see whether we could get the audience to invest in the lies. I am not for one minute suggesting that this had a life-altering effect upon those that watched *at last sight*, nevertheless for two cast members the border between the fictional performance/acting, and reality was crossed. The programme began as a lie but for Sarah Robertson and myself, it became a truth, in this respect we effectively managed to 'stage the real'. Not only that, we were 'working through our' presents, and at the same 'dealing with the present of performance'. This is given further complexity, when we consider that in Liege, the cast embarked upon what can only be described as invisible theatre. We decided to 'play up' the role(s) of lovers both before and after the actual performance. In talking with various audience members after the show, it became clear that many of them, if not quite all, believed what was stated in the programme. Beyond the staged performance, I 'played the role' of Sarah Skeltons' lover, to all intents and purposes, this 'staging' was believed, and for me, there was, in hindsight a great deal of acting going on for the best part of a week. This

style .



was unforeseen by the cast and the director, and to my mind, (<sup>sf</sup>disregarding the ethical questions of invisible theatre) enabled us to create an original piece of performance. Some of the lies in the programme became truths in reality. ✓

However, conversely, some of the truths, in as much as they were truthful, over a period of time, became lies in performance. For instance, a piece of dialogue written for me, that was intended to utilise my natural nervousness as a performer, became a lie:

"...to be honest, I'm feeling a little bit nervous, what with the lights, and you looking at me. I had hoped that this would be the kind of performance where I could pretend that the audience wasn't there, but every time I look up, I see you..." (vii)

At the start of the first performance in Liege, this was another safety net through which I could not fall. It was the moment where I was effectively performing a part of 'myself', and asking to be forgiven any mishaps or stumbles. However, by the conclusion of the project, it had become the moment where I felt as far removed from myself as I had previously felt close. ✓ In short, what began as a 'truthful' presentation, ✓ had become the most 'acted' section. This was/is a measure of how far I think I have travelled as a performer/actor/person, throughout the course of making *at last sight*. I will endeavour to trace, briefly, this transition now.

As previously mentioned, we claimed that the text was not fixed and that we were licenced to perform any sections that we wished at any given time. In Liege certainly, this was palpably not true. The familiarity was, to a large degree acted. This is not intended to be derogatory, as it was our premiere performance, we were not as familiar with the piece as we are now. It is ironic, that in Liege, the audience appeared to <sup>be</sup> convinced by our plausibility at the very same time that I, at least, considered it more acted than ever before or since. ✓ This though may well have been